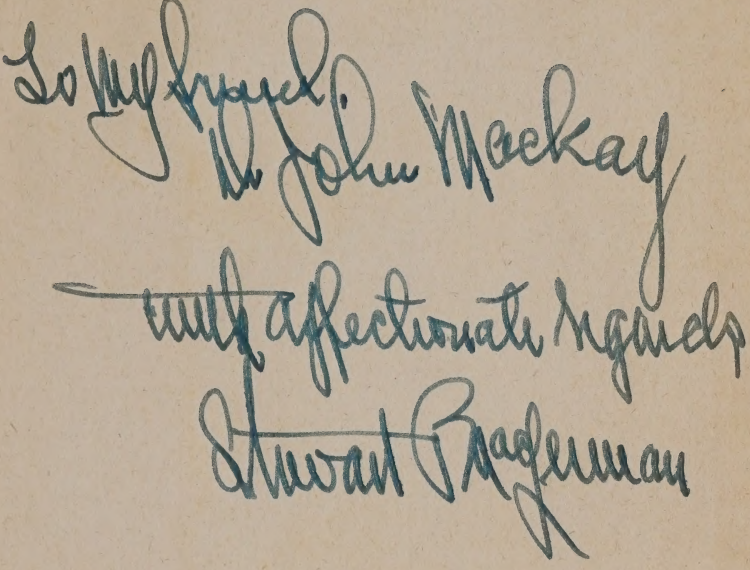
The Galilean

Library of The Theological Seminary
PRINCETON • NEW JERSEY

FROM THE LIBRARY OF THE
REVEREND JOHN ALEXANDER MACKAY
LITT.D., D.D., LL.D., L.H.D.

PZ3
.D419G


To my friend
Dr John Mackay
with affectionate regards
Stewart Bagleman

THE GALILEAN

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
OCT 21 1968
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE GALILEAN

... A Life of Jesus ...

by

ALBERT DE PINA
and
STEWART P. MAC LENNAN

MURRAY & GEE, INC.
HOLLYWOOD
1945

Copyright 1945
By ALBERT DE PINA *and* STEWART P. MAC LENNAN
All rights reserved. This book or
parts thereof must not be used
in any form without permission.

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America

FOR

JAIME PALMER

WITHOUT WHOM THIS BOOK WOULD NEVER HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT . . . WHOSE LOVING UNDERSTANDING MADE IT POSSIBLE. . . . . .

Introduction

There have been certain epochs in the history of mankind which, in contradistinction with eras of minor crises, unmistakeably bear the stamp of major crises, and point toward the nebulous outlines of a new orientation.

The ministry of Jesus in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, was an epoch of such crisis; the fall of the Roman empire; the various Renaissance movements — and in our own times, the first world war, whose repercussions have merged with the gigantic hecatomb of the second.

During each crisis, humanity has drawn a little closer to that ineffable fountainhead of all wisdom whom Jesus called: "Our Father." It is therefore fitting, as this immense physical and spiritual struggle draws to a close, and the outlines of a new era are visible, as if through a glass darkly, that in searching for a new extension of being we should turn our eyes to the greatest, the most incomparable Teacher of them all — the brief span of whose Ministry has been and is, the exalting counterpoint to the discordant music of all history.

While the character of Jesus, as herein portrayed, is not strictly orthodox, nor the human, all too human figure certain writers have delineated, we have tried to re-discover the transcendental originality of Jesus, the purity and love which permeate his every word and action.

Many years of study and research, of travel and painstaking analysis of all available data, precede this book. Anything that Jesus is here quoted as either saying or doing, is based on history and authority. Further, in the use of the Gospels, a purely psychological approach has been used for the sake of correlation and historical accuracy. In speaking of the Gospels, the *canonical* Gospels are meant, of course, for while the authors are acquainted with the Apocryphal Gospels, these are of too dubious a value to be acceptable as authorities. There existed other Gospels — now lost to us — fragments of which were originally preserved by the Fathers of the Church, such as the Gospel according to the Egyptians, and the Gospels according to the Hebrews, which were written in archaic Aramaic, as well as those attributed to Tatian and Marcion.

But even these, which like the *Logia* of Matthew, were the Gospel of the *Ebionim,* the small *Batanean* Christian sects, do not possess the value of such Gospels as Matthew's and Luke's.

While the authors of this Life of Jesus have exercised complete restraint in matters of historical significance, a

reinterpretation of the characters, motives, aspirations and *modus viviendi,* not to speak of *operandi,* of those great secondary figures which surrounded Jesus, has been attempted in the light of our present psychological knowledge — without doing violence to recorded history.

Freed from the debris of dogma and custom, from the obscurantism of the indolent, and the materialism of the selfish, we sought to bring to these pages that transcendent understanding, that profound love of humanity, that warm consciousness of the value and dignity of human life, which filled the heart of Jesus.

Albert de Pina, Ph.D.
Stewart P. MacLennan, D.D.

Hollywood, California,
August 15th, 1945.

I

Caiaphas, High Priest and son-in-law of an ex-High Priest, had risen before dawn, and in the grey chiaroscuro of that early hour, repaired to the magnificent austerity of his study where he usually received an endless series of reports.

For Caiaphas would have invented his genius for intrigue had he not been born with it, so necessary was it for him to justify the 'traditions' of the Chosen People. Besides, Hanan, his father-in-law, would never have let him forget it.

He had been reading Scriptures the previous evening, delighting in the sonorous passages which had been their races' great contribution to their world, and to which Caiaphas had every intention of adding an ironic anti-climax of his own. He sat in the stiff-back chair basking in the warmth of a fire of coals and watched whimsically for a moment how the darting flames reflected a bright patina on his robe. By association of ideas he thought of Pilate, and the ignominy of the conquerors' rule which placed the High Priest's robes, stiff with gold embroidery and precious stones, in the Roman Governor's keeping.

At the unwelcome thought, his high forehead wrinkled with vertical lines over the long, curved nose; the

thin, cruel lips compressed into a horizontal line, and the dark, intelligent eyes glowed with inward fires. He thought of the incense necessary to dispel the heathen touch, and the blasphemy of his sacred garment being in the keeping of heathen hands. The smouldering hatred of the Romans gave his chiseled features a malignant cast, like a bird of prey that meditates in silence some form of attack that would vanquish a superior enemy.

With an effort he turned mentally to the Talmud. The Sanhedrim was to meet at his house at break of day, and there was a prescribed ritual in the interrogation of those accused of 'corruption' and of 'blasphemy,' that would have to be invoked. And yet, some part of him searched for that distilled essence of the Jewish faith that resided in the Law. Not for the categorical limitations it imposed on their lives, not for the irrevocable clarity of its content, but for that deeper meaning which sought to outlaw and destroy all that was foreign and meant change, and in which he hoped to discover a justification for the course he had charted in his mind.

Slowly he became absorbed in his own thoughts. He was like a study in ivory and black, his pale complexion paler still against the contrast of dark eyes and darker hair. Perhaps he had a momentary premonition that the floodgates were opened, and he was too late to stave off the flood that was soon to sweep over Israel. But this curious, momentary hesitation of the High Priest Caiaphas, confronted with the inquisitorial questioning and trial of a 'blasphemer,' was foreign to his character. Hanan, the ex-High Priest, and his father-in-law, had already questioned the culprit, had already decided on his fate and sent him to Caiaphas for the necessary

approval — a mere gesture, nothing more, for he would never have dared to veto Hanan's decision.

Caiaphas paused meditatively and glanced out the window where the morning star in the heavens, pulsed every moment with a more tender intention. A profound silence wrapped Jerusalem, and the searching wind of March fanned the livid coals to renewed life. He wondered with faint amusement whether the prophets, peering from the summit of some remote heaven, could see the stupendous drama that was being enacted in the Holy Land, and write on the spectral pages of a book, a new addition to the Law.

But his sardonic reverie was arrested in mid-flight for day was breaking, baring the desolate expanse of treeless hills and rock that surrounded the great city, touching with the evanescent splendour of the dawn the metal plates on the dome of the second temple.

The sun was rising in the east, behind the arid hills east of Jordan. Already the measured tread of the members of the Sanhedrim was heard . . .

With a sign, Caiaphas rose. He had made his decision.

II

Jerusalem flashes like a white jewel under the ardent rays of the morning sun. The narrow streets begin to overflow with pilgrims; Greeks and Romans jostle Arabs and Jews, as thousands of newcomers filter into the city. A thousand cries echo through the tortuous thoroughfares, hawksters plying their trade with shrill monotony. Camels laden with goods and humanity pick their way delicately over the cobble-stones, and spit viciously at those that come too near; the inns are filled to overflowing, and a hundred quarrels keep the centurions busy maintaining peace. The heavy odor of oils, incense and acrid sweat is almost overpowering, but no one seems to mind.

The Feast of Passover is almost at hand. The pilgrims count the days — four, three . . . only two days more! Meanwhile the surging throngs are like a tidal wave that flows irresistibly towards the temple hill; there, in the lower arcades, a thousand rumors and counter rumors are exchanged. Sophisticated Jews from Rome recount the illnesses of Tiberius fearfully maintaining seclusion on Capri, or perhaps the momentary caprice which stilled forever a well-known voice. The latest fashions current in Rome are expatiated on with elegantly simulated ennui. These are the supercilious dwellers on the Tiber, whom

the Pharisees abhor for their easy tolerance and, perhaps, for the wealth they have amassed in the services of the Emperor. It was such as these, reason the priests, who translated the sacred scriptures into Greek and made them known to barbarian and heathen alike, but they bring rich offerings — bullocks with gilded horns, and pairs of rams yoked with silver halters.

Among them, learned men of Araby, with their turbans and flowing beards, and their inscrutable black eyes, who speak of strange sciences and methods of healing (sciences and methods which the priests disdain, for Judea had not absorbed as yet the science of Greece and Araby, or for that matter the importations that flourished in Rome itself). There are other rumors, too, of perhaps greater interest to the Jews themselves, for Jerusalem is a smouldering volcano, and the provinces — especially Galilee are ready to burst into flame — rumors of a new prophet who proclaims a new Messiah by the banks of the Jordan where he baptized, and of bands of young Galileans ready to shed blood for the Holy Land.

The arcades are a place to meet and be met, to listen to and distill the gossip and conjecture of a welter of races and of cults and sects. Sadducees, ironical and keen, wonder how long the Pharisees would condone the vagaries of the moon, or more immediate still, how soon they would begin cleaning up the stars!

The spies and informers of the High Priest are everywhere, blandly asking leading questions — the answers to which would be carefully noted and after being embroidered upon, would be repeated to Caiaphas. The great sacerdotal families such as Hanan's, send their minions, too, keeping always an ear to the ground, and

a straw on the wind. Here, on the great third terrace, the court of the heathen holds sway; above them is the second terrace, sacred, inviolate and forbidden. Signs in Latin and Greek proclaim the death penalty to Gentiles who climb the nineteen steps that separate the unbeliever from the faithful.

Slowly the sun climbs to the zenith, and the overpowering babel of sounds and scents rises higher as the market is in full session. Jews from Alexandria and Rome — Babylonians, Arabs, Romans and Greeks. It is a cross-section of humanity, and a cross-section, too, of the art and science of cheating, as the traders shrewdly estimate the purse and temper of the buyers.

Silks and frankincense, the perfumes of Araby, and camel caravans laden with rarest treasures from afar, flock into the city of God. A great processional with uplifted voices comes into the great square; the tired beasts fold their front legs as they come to a lurching stop and with a groan settle to the ground blowing through their pendulous lips. No one pays attention but the priests who have come to greet them, lured by the brilliant costumes of the pilgrims and, perhaps, by the hope of priceless offerings.

All these treasures — where do they go? Who can be trusted to give a faithful stewardship of so much wealth? These are questions that the Governor Pilate would like to ask. But he knows it is useless to try to find out. Already his too close inquiries into matters of the Temple, have brought riots and unrisings against which, he had to take sanguinary measures, and these in turn, brought repercussions from Rome. For these insufferable, stiff-necked priests were not above writing to

the Emperor himself to demand justice! Justice indeed! Rome had conquered the world, and yet the image of the Emperor could not be stamped on a Jewish coin!

The first service has long since been over, the morning offering has been slain and the trumpet has sounded thrice; the blood of the sacrifice has been consecrated to the Temple and finally the incense burned on the golden altar has been dissipated in the wind. The second service of noon is over, too. Already the sun-drenched afternoon is waning and the desert wind whispers through the narrow, cobbled streets and plucks at the robes of the believers and unbelievers alike.

Now the setting sun reflects its paling rays on the Acropolis Antonia which the conquerors have fortified on the hilltop that the Maccabees had held two centuries before. The fortress Antonia dominates the Temple and frowns on Jerusalem, withdrawn and aloof from the seditious and turbulent city that hates its conquerors with a hatred and a scorn which has no parallel in history.

Pilate, the Governor, is aware of the seething unrest; grimly, he has promised himself to give them a lesson they will remember for all history, if they so much as stage another riot. Still, his fear of the Emperor makes him pale at the thought of more trouble. He silently curses this fanatical nation that would rather die than allow even him to enter the Holy of Holies.

His is a bitter dilemma. Taxes are dwindling and opposition is mounting. If he forces their hand ruthlessly, there would be an uprising to suppress, and that might cost him his Governorship; if he does not, Rome would consider him lax, or dishonest — which is worse.

Just now his more immediate, his imperative concern

was Hanan. It maddened him to think that the ex-High Priest should wield greater power in secret than he, the Governor himself. It forced Pilate to excesses he abhorred, and which further infuriated the people. But what was he to do? He was compelled to threaten, to curb and spy upon the city until Jerusalem could not call its soul its own. And that was Hanan's subtle warfare, to force oppression to the point where revolt would flare.

Hanan, scion of one of the oldest sacerdotal families, had reached a venerable age. He was an immense mountain of a man with the delicate, flexible hands of a woman. Swathed in priceless cloths from which protruded the obese face, one was instantly aware of the liquid dark eyes full of intelligence and power. He had only two passions — freedom for the Jews — (under him of course,) and food. There was a steely and inflexible soul imprisoned in all this flesh. But he loved the Temple, and he loved his people — the Chosen People — as he never failed to point out, especially to Romans! He was profoundly devout, with a fanatical devotion to the letter of the Scriptures. He had read everything extant in the limited realm of Judea, and knew all the prophets and prophecies by heart; an expert at Law, Scripture and Text, he had acquired the aroma of a complete disillusion concerning 'things to come.' He was learned in the councils and interpretations, and had forgotten everything about them except an ironical impression of dissensions and disputes. After all, he would reason, what was writ, was writ, and no interpretation required, forgetting with superb aplomb, that he himself was responsible for no small number of *interpretations.*

His genius for intrigue was secondary only to that of

Caiaphas. For Hanan was one of those men who could go to the heart of a problem as unerringly as the spear of the Angel Gabriel, and leave the exquisite embroidering on detail to more tortuous minds. In Caiaphas, his son-in-law, Hanan had found an admirable complement. He felt with a curious pang of happiness, that between the two of them they could make sure that, if Judea could find no solace in thralldom, Rome would find scant pleasure in their conquest.

Often, as the shadows lengthened and the skies glittered with tiers of stars blazing over the sleeping land, Hanan would hold discourse with other elders, reclining on couches placed conveniently near to the laden table where the candlelight gleamed on the ruddy gold of pomegranates and the royal purple of figs. The very soul of Judea would be uncovered as the talk flowed from lined and wrinkled face to lined face, and measures to circumvent the conquerors were discussed. They talked about other things too — the benevolent philosophy of Hillel, and the prophecies of Jeremiah. They talked on whether the incense burned before the Holy of Holies on days of atonement should be lighted after or before the entrance of the High Priest; on how many paces one should walk on the Sabbath, and whether dogma and textual criticism were open to interpretation by anyone except the High Priest. The Sadducees, whose scorn for the commentaries which were written later, sprang from a desire to enjoy their wealth and power — not to speak of their pleasures — came in for their share of rebuke.

Over these endless post-mortems, the voice of Hanan always dominated, a voice that was low and poised and unhurried — instinct with power. This then was the man

over whom Pontius Pilatus lost hours of precious sleep, and who, through the instrumentality of Caiaphas, was to underwrite the history of the Chosen People for untold centuries to come.

They talked endlessly, and mulled over and over the scraps of news and evidence their minions brought from the market place and by-ways. The charges of uncleanliness and sloth among hapless followers, whose dwellings would be immediately viewed with harsh critical eyes, until the very walls, be it palace or humble cottage, would be inspected. They talked and talked, weaving a gossamer web of evanescent words, more deadly than spears, for all their intangible nature as their sound died away. And secretly they comforted their hearts that perhaps before their day was done, another revolt such as that of Judas, of Galilee, would flame again from the glowing embers in the hearts of the descendants of the slain. They hoped with all their being that this time the revolt would succeed.

When their thoughts turned to this subject closest to their hearts, faces would become harsh, cold, immobile, as they pondered on all those Romanized Jews in Rome and elsewhere, who had debased their versatility and talent for languages to the point of making translations of Scripture.

They are old men, old in years and in spirit, weary of lifetimes consecrated to a *letter* that is dead, and which imprisons a spirit that might soar. It is an epoch of transition and of *becoming* in which a great star of divine wisdom is rising. But there are none to see it, none but a small group that is alien to the power and splendor of the Temple and the pageantry of the Feast of Passover looming ever nearer as the hours pass.

III

He was born with the gift of happiness, and a sense of the divine dignity of Man. It was the Roman year of 750, perhaps a little later; Augustus reigned. And, because the name of his earthly father was Joseph, and he was their first born, they named him Jesus. He first opened his eyes in Bethlehem. Later he was taken to the home of his parents in Nazareth of Galilee.

Nazareth was a pleasant town, small, intimate, of perhaps not more than five thousand souls. It nestles in a miniature valley that broadens upwards, towards where the mountains guard the plain of Esdraelon to the north. The summers are warm and rich with the fragrance of myriad flowers, and the winters cold and clear as the frosty brilliance of the stars in its skies. Most of the dwellings, even those of the rich and powerful, were alike except in size, white cubes built of native materials, and surrounded by flowering vines and fig-trees, and riotous flower gardens where the plants nourished by sun and wind and rich soil, spread their varihued mantles.

Climbing to the nearby rise to the north, the stately outlines of Carmel are visible, and the double summit which towers above Megiddo, the high country of the Sechem, the hills of Gilboa and lovely, rounded Tabor,

Northward still, on the curving flank of Hermon, nestles Caesarea-Philippi. To the south are the somber Samaritan hills and the parched lands of Judea, swept by the withering winds that from the desert, brought the very breath of death.

But here in Nazareth, smiling nature was at peace and it was here that Jesus spent the first years of his youth.

According to the methods of the East, Jesus learned to read and write from his *hazzan*. But he learned, too, from the wise men of Araby who travelled the region on the great caravan route, and from the innumerable pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.

It is known that early in his childhood his education had surpassed the conventional teaching then in vogue, and which forms part of the *Targums* and the *Midrashim;* but it is not known when came the superb intelligence, the swift sense of *keening* — that understanding that graved in his growing mind a profound understanding of mankind.

As he grew, surrounded by his parents, his brothers and sisters, in the simple one-room dwelling that served as shop, kitchen and sleeping-quarters, he learned the carpenter's trade, and did his stint of work by the side of Joseph. He never shirked, for it was never his nature to take advantage of escape, but curiously, his heart was not in there. Only when he could ascend to the heights where the clouds seemed to be at arms' length, and the deep silence of the evening was broken only by the murmur of the wind, or the ascending music of a lark in flight, was he really happy. Here, communing with himself, lost in reverie while the evening star seemed to be leading forth the whole heavens in its wonder and the

breeze set all the grasses sighing, he was at peace. As if something, some great inner urge drew him towards that translucent sky, so much like a great sapphirine shard.

The education of young Jesus grew apace, he began to select and reject from all the material at hand with an originality which was later to be the key to his character. To him, the books of the Old Testament were an experience. The canon of the Holy Scriptures was composed of the Pentateuch, or the Law, and the Prophets. The factitious laws, dating to the pietist kings, had become an inexhaustible fountain of subtle interpretations, since Judea no longer had a government of its own. The Prophets and Psalms had been given an allegorical interpretation in which everyone sought to find references to a Messiah. But to Jesus was revealed the true poetry of the Bible which was lost to the exegetists of Jerusalem under the mountainous debris of dogma and aspirations. He found little kinship in his heart for the Law, but the Psalms seemed to whisper deeper meanings to his poetic soul. They became part of his being.

He found in the Prophets, especially in Isaiah, with his brilliant invective and profound eloquence, a lesser echo to his thoughts, and in the apocrypal writings of the Book of Daniel, written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, an expression of the spiritual state of his time.

Slowly his development unfolded. The years receded into the infinite womb of time, and the spiritual, the distinctive character of Jesus began early to reveal itself. It was a character that was destined to flower in one of the greatest periods of crises in the history of Judea.

Herod, the Great, who had died approximately at the birth of Jesus, had left three sons who ruled under the dispensation of Rome. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, who added to his inquities the evil influence of Herodias, his wife; Philip, Tetrarch of Gaulonitis and Batanea, into whose dominions Jesus made later frequent trips; and Archelaus, ethnarch of Jerusalem, whom Augustus deposed about the time Jesus was ten or eleven years of age. The last chance to self-government had been lost to Jerusalem, which thereafter had a series of Roman Procurators — or Governors, subordinated in important matters to the imperial Legate of Syria. Following each other, Coponius, Marcus Ambivius; Annius Rufus; Valerius Gratus, who of valor and grace had but three letters, which spelled 'ass,' and finally, Pontius Pilatus, all were eternally occupied in trying to douse with the waters of Roman might, the seething flames of the Judaic volcano.

It was in this period that Jesus grew to manhood, surrounded by the stupendous dream which for centuries had haunted the Jewish people. A dream that concentrated all its power, all its love, all its desire upon the future of the nation. Bitter had been the reality from the ninth century before our era, when brutal force had assumed the dominion of the known world.

But the dream persisted. A dream wherein the Roman eagles were vanquished and the votive scutcheons of the procurators with their hint of idolatry in the inscriptions, would be shattered.

Jesus was not concerned with these things. Political events did not move him. The furnace which Galilee had become, wherein the most diverse elements were seething, did not touch him. His was a greater fire that transcended this volcano fed by mundane fagots. He followed the trade of his parent as a carpenter, until in

his nineteenth year death tarried briefly at his house. Joseph died.

Through the great seething cauldron that Judea had become, through the currents and counter-currents that swept through Galilee, Jesus held aloof from all sedition. His was not a preoccupation with that most obstinate of all Jewish dogmas: "A Jew has not a Master — the Bible is our constitution!" His preoccupation dealt with that profound, that growing awareness of a greater mission in which he dreamt of another kingdom — another kind of deliverance.

It was an age when the belief in the Messiah fermented throughout the Holy Land. They thought themselves on the very eve of the great Renovation, and the Scriptures were strained to distill hopeful meanings for their titanic hopes.

But still they saw in the awaited Messiah, an earthly King — in the deliverance merely a Judea for the Jews. And above all, Pharisee and Sadducee and Essene alike, based the deliverance on Power — a power that sadly could not be of the spirit for it was to be poured into the brittle, narrow mold of Palestine.

These ideas were taught in no school, but they burned in the very air; crackled in the glances of contempt of Jew for Roman, for Greek, for Arab . . . until sometimes the very renewal of the glories of Jerusalem implied the complete annihilation of the rest of the world.

But free from selfishness, Jesus thought only of humanity, of that mission that daily grew clearer in his mind, and seemed to spring from the deepest recesses of his heart. Often, as he sat on the summit of the mountain of Nazareth, untroubled by doubt, feeling the nearness

of his Divine Father, he felt a profound compassion for the ant-hill below.

It was during these occasions that he felt an ineffable peace, a one-ness with the Universal Spirit that exalted him, and yet left trembling with a sense of complete ecstacy.

He saw in the surrounding mountains and the distant shimmer of the sea, in the great tiers of stars blazing like fiery roses, in the very sussurration of the breeze that caressed his face, a living demonstration of the Infinite Power — and perhaps, the symbol of a new heaven for all men.

For already Jesus knew himself to be in communion with God. Already the dross of the imperative demands of the body had burned away for lack of the fuel of passion. And already the highest consciousness of God which ever blossomed in humanity, had come into being.

And then, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the twenty-eighth of our era, a new voice was heard after two centuries of silence; a new Prophet had arisen and come from the desert a short distance from Hebron. Whose was this new voice? What was the burden of its prophecy? Did it speak of the resurrection? Would the Onyx on the breastplate of the High Priest be replaced, signifying that Jehovah was once more present at the sacrifices? Was this Elias returned to restore the glories of Israel?

No one knew. Rumours were rife. But it was said that he was baptizing at the Jordan whence immediately pilgrims of all sorts and descriptions wended their way.

IV

His name was John. An extraordinary figure of a man, he towered gaunt and hard-muscled over lesser men, harsh in the deep trumpet of his voice, tanned to a dark mahogany by the fierce caress of the desert. In his ragged cloak of skins, with the black, matted hair falling about his gaunt cheeks and corded throat, he was an awesome figure, to which the burning light in his eyes added a touch of grotesque grandeur.

John was of the priestly race. Where he had been born was something of a mystery — his whole life in the absence of documentary proof, being in a sense, enigmatic. It was thought he was born in Hebron, which is located at the edge of the desert of Judea and a few hours from the Arabian desert. From his childhood, the new prophet had been reared as a *Nazir,* which included the vow of abstinence almost to everything that means pleasure in life. He ate, but his nourishment had consisted of locusts and honey; he slept, but it was upon the cold sands of some desert cave. Like the very beasts of the desert he had been hardened to the most rigorous hardships — and like them he had an untameable soul. He had the loins of a gladiator, and the thin, aquiline face of an ascetic; in the burning amber glance of his mag-

netic eyes, was mirrored both a profound conviction, and a profound scorn. He had the bearing of one who is on a royal mission, and the disdain of a saint for any obstacle in his path.

What fires had consumed that wracked and virile body before even the very vestige of passion had been burned out, no one would know. What exquisite torture that commanding will had undergone before he could reconcile himself to his heraldship, is not recorded. But John — John of Harmon — later John the Baptist, had learned silence, and in the extreme economy of his words there was need only that he should announce the coming of the Lord.

He was the last descendant of the great, true Prophets of Israel, and now, in the midst of despairing for the destiny of Israel, a new Prophet had come, burst upon them from the desolate reaches of the desert, to agitate their minds and reawaken their hopes. They remembered Elias, the greatest of them all; the rough and savage Prophet of Carmel, who had by degrees become a legend. It was he who in the belief of the people was to return and restore Israel. In their minds, too, a solitary life, the life an an anchorite was an essential characteristic, for they were accustomed to conceive a man of God as a hermit, abstaining from all pleasures of the flesh, living as no average human being could possibly live and survive.

It was natural for the people not only to accept John as a Prophet, but also to believe that he was Elias who had risen again. Some even took John to be the Messiah himself, but he disclaimed any such pretensions. Although the very heart of John's sphere of action was

Judea, his fame soared and flowed everywhere, including Galilee, and at last, reached Jesus.

The news of the daily baptisms at the Jordan have reached the town of Nazareth in its mountain hollow. So many friends of Jesus—many who have heard him quote Scripture and text with admirable clarity, and at times give way to those miniature sermons delivered on his doorstep of evenings — have made the pilgrimage to the mouth of the Jordan. They have returned filled with the ringing message of the Baptist, and perhaps exaggerating in perspective the impressive scene, they are replete with tales of wonder.

But what is the message which already has obtained for John the Baptist an ever-widening following, much like the ripples caused by a stone hurled into a lake widen progressively towards the distant shores?

These friends and followers tell Jesus. It is at times a harsh, stern, an almost violent message; at others, John seems to admonish his listeners with words that are like an echo of the very words Jesus has used in the past.

Jesus, the quiet young man with the wealth of chestnut hair, the dark eyes instinct with a profound love, and a profound insight into the poor passion of the heart, is moved. The young teacher who understanding much, forgives all, is filled with wonder. He asks them what does John say? But their accounts differ, for in perspective each one seems to have had his own individual experience. But all are agreed in the atmosphere of sanctity, in the terrible earnestness of the gaunt Prophet.

They tell Jesus that John did not refuse to baptize publicans, and when asked what to do, had replied: "He that hath two coats, let him give to him that hath none; and him that hath meat, let him do likewise."

Division of property! A ringing challenge to the jealous stewardship of the rich, forever disdainful and niggardly with the poor. They tell Jesus a great many answers that John has given them, and at last Jesus decides to go himself.

For years now he has been pondering in silence, preaching only to a few close friends those truths he has felt in his heart, and here in John the Baptist, those truths were being given wings in soaring words. A Prophet inveighing against the oily, sanctimonious dogma of the priests, against the hypocrisy of the elders, who were more concerned with being seen bending over Scripture than with Scripture itself, until their eyes were bright as spiders' when bending over the Torah. Was he an Essene? A pietist with a message for the people? A teacher spewed by the desert in an hour of crisis?

Jesus joins the next caravan of pilgrims going to the Jordan. There are hundreds, for the fame of the Baptist has spread swiftly since the day when two shepherds first heard his ringing cry and took him among their people. It is a dusty and thirsty journey, but at last Jesus arrives. The air is stifling with the odors of sweat and animal flesh, for goats and asses have been brought, as well as the ill and the infirm. Swarms of children have accompanied these poor people who come with a vague hope in their poverty and misery — even a word of solace would be a miracle. They reach the narrow valley, rock-strewn and overhung by limestone hills, through which

the stiflling desert wind roars as if through a tunnel. Some fall on the ground overcome by exhaustion, others are praying on their knees, while still others stand on tip-toe striving for a glimpse of the Baptist.

Jesus is among these last. There on the further rim of the waters he sees John the Baptist. The tall figure in the ragged cloak, lean and impassive, but for the burning eyes; behind him at a brief distance stand his disciples whose existence parallels John's in fasts and abstinence. But where John's features are full of zeal and his eyes abrim with fire, theirs invite sympathy with their air of sadness.

There is no humility in John. He speaks in thundering tones, and at intervals baptizes with the grey-green waters of the Jordan which gleam translucent in the strong sunlight.

Jesus senses that John is about his own age, although the ascetic life of the desert has left its marks. Jesus feels the stirrings of an emotion that for the moment he cannot understand. But his self-analysis is cut short, for a group of richly dressed Pharisees, perhaps a dozen all told, descend into the valley by the road from Jerusalem. Jesus immediately recognizes them for what they are, priests and Levites, whose supercilious glances and wrinkled noses are more eloquent than any words.

They have been sent to inquire into this man whose astounding popularity has become as a thorn on the side of the Pharisees and Sadducees alike. This tremendous following must be scattered if possible; nothing good could come of giving false hopes of deliverance to the rabble. So reasons the council in Jerusalem. Since John has been reviling the rich and pouring invective, Pilate,

the Governor, has looked askance at the Elders who tolerate such disturbances.

The Pharisees face John.

The moment is electric with feeling.

The surly pilgrims who have made way through an ingrained respect for authority surround them in a great semi-circle. In the insufferably hot day the clashing glances of the priests and Levites are mordant.

The voice of one among them rises high and thin, abrupt and insolent: "Speak, who art thou?" The eldest of the newcomers questions John, and the quaver in his voice is from age, not from lack of effrontery.

"I am not the Christ!" John replies calmly, but it is the calm before an earthquake.

"Art thou Elijah?" The question is flung at the Baptist with all the force of an insult.

"I am not." John replies, imperturbable still.

"Art thou then a Prophet?"

"No!"

"Who art thou, then, that we may give an answer to those that sent us? What sayest thou?"

John has been girding himself for this moment, a vast contempt mirrored in his face; now he throws back his great shoulders, the shoulders of a Leander, and Jesus who among the pilgrims senses the leashed power in John the Baptist, awaits the answer.

The reply is not long in coming, it erupts in sonorous tones that shatter the stillness: "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Isaiah!"

But his questioners, though taken aback, are not through.

"Why baptizes thou, then if thou be not the Christ, nor yet Isaiah — if thou be not a Prophet?"

"I baptize with water. But one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with fire."

The Pharisees pale visibly before the latent power of the man. They smile thinly and exchange glances with one another. John's popularity is too great, and these weary pilgrims for all their woes look ready to tear them limb from limb. They decide to compromise.

"Why doest thou not go to Samaria, then? Or to those heathen lands where thou wouldst find thousands upon thousands to repent?"

It is a question and an insinuation. And at last John's wrath pours out in a deluge, "O viper's brood, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father. I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire."

John's hands are upraised, and his tremendous stature is enhanced by his towering posture as he heaps anathema upon them. A vast sigh seems to escape the crowd in a rippling sibilation. The priests and Levites are grey with fright.

One summons enough courage to say sneeringly, "We have heard enough!"

They turn to go.

John the Baptist gazes after them with his dark, brooding glance in which lightnings still flash.

Now more than ever the multitude is convinced that John is indeed a Prophet; he has confounded the priests and scribes, who since time immemorial have been opposed to a resurrection of the ancient propheticism. Fearing that the power of the people may be awakened by these recurrent religious enthusiasts, they find themselves in a dilemma, for they seek to eliminate prophets, while keeping alive the prophetic promise of a Messiah.

John the Baptist they hate. That is clear. But his great and growing popularity deters them. John preaches against all that stands for official Judaism, oppulent priesthood, Pharisees, pomp!

The people flock to this austere herald who never ceases to cry, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

From the midst of the group that surrounds him, Jesus has watched the scene. Pale with fatigue and the intense heat, his features seem even more refined, the flowing chestnut locks darker against the pallor of his face.

A phrase revolves over and over in his mind with the persistent clarity of an illumination: *"One mightier than I cometh . . ."* As if the very stones had absorbed the echo of the prophecy, as if the very sands had drunk the words as thirstily as rain, the whole universe about him echoes and re-echoes the message that is a swelling symphony in the mind of Jesus.

Presently the ritual of baptism begins again, and the endless caravan of pilgrims seeks solace and a new re-birth in the placid greenish waters of the Jordan.

V

Jesus was among the very last. But the next day his turn came. He was sitting on a large boulder, meditating, his eyes fixed on the shifting patterns of light that broke and then re-grouped on the waters when the pilgrim immediately before him was baptized.

It was his moment.

John the Baptist turned towards him.

Jesus arose in a movement of unstudied grace and strode towards John. For an instant they eyed each other. John the taller of the two, powerful — unkempt; Jesus the epitome of symetry as he disrobed and stood nude awaiting the baptism.

He looked up into the eyes of John, raising his own a little, and the ghost of a smile barely touched his lips and eyes — eyes guileless and as kind as an eternity of forgiveness.

In a low, vibrant voice of haunting sweetness, Jesus told John his name, where he lived, his occupation.

Finally in a tone which was both a question and a request, Jesus asked, "Wilst thou baptize me?"

John for all his youth had looked into many a heart, and as his fierce eagle's gaze probed into the face before him, he was struck with a profound astonishment.

A carpenter's son who was himself a carpenter.

Whence this admirable poise? The modulated tones flowed like music. It seemed to John despite Jesus' humility that the young man before him, asking for baptism, had the bearing of a king!

John sensed a profound purity of heart, something that he was unable to define, because he had never encountered it before, and was outside of his experience.

And thus for an instant John and Jesus stood, drenched in the amber flood of morning sunlight. The surging crowds of pilgrims, who had arrived during the night, watched them.

At last John led Jesus into the river, where they stood waist deep in the waters, and Jesus bent his head. The contrast was like light and shadow, for Jesus in the full plentitude of his manhood was all symetry and grace, while John still retained all the native harshness of the desert.

John the Baptist was intent upon the ritual of his office; Jesus was thinking of his Father as John performed the baptism.

Someone began to chant among the crowds, and the multitude joined. Their voices lifted in the clear air and echoed from the hills.

When Jesus emerged from the Jordan, he drew apart from the crowds for a moment. It seemed to him that part of his serenity was gone, although he did not know why. He closed his eyes and strove to regain his inner peace.

Perhaps it was the heady quality of the burning sunlight — all that clear air — the mingled voices uplifted to the Lord. In the baptism he had been cleansed of

sin. But what sin? He whose life had been singularly free from all the poor passion of the flesh.

And without warning, as if heaven and earth had merged in a vast cataract of flame, Jesus saw a vision behind the closed lids of his eyes. A voice — was it a voice? Was this the primeval thunder of all the universe since time began?

Echoing in his heart, the voice was clear and unmistakeable as it said: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* A voice that was part of Jesus, and part of the wind, the very earth — the wheeling majesty of the stars. . . .

How often he had sensed it before in the eternal mystery of life, in the renewing fire of Spring, the curving flight of a bird. But now the voice came with overwhelming power, as if at last he had irrevocably taken the first great step in that winding trail that for humanity was to be the road of Life.

Shaken to the innermost recesses of his being, the need for solitude was so great that Jesus fled from the waters and the people and John the Baptist, seeking, in the lonely and austere heart of the desert, a haven of refuge where he could commune.

There are moments in human existence of a significance so great, that all that has gone before seems trivial in retrospect, elementary, the preliminary to the crisis that is to come.

It is a pale perspective, a minor undulation of a tonality in contrast with the mighty crescendo of the real symphony. And so it seemed to Jesus as he thought of his years by the side of Joseph, when he absorbed Scripture and tried to fathom, to make part of his experience The

Law and Prophets. Later, when Joseph had died and he had shared the responsibility of their home with Mary; then the evening discourses as friends gathered and they sat on the doorstep of their humble dwelling. Jesus remembered how his own unique interpretations grew apace, strengthened, became convictions that regulated his every thought and action, and flowed into his every word and counsel.

But now, in the midst of the arid and inhospitable desert, the very antithesis of all that he loved — harsh and unyielding — it was even more difficult for him to marshall his thoughts.

Yet he was determined to discover the very meaning of that voice, the voice of Him who had spoken at the baptism. Here in the vast desert waste there was no time. It seemed to stand still, removed from the feverish activity of the world he had left behind.

And the days flowed into weeks as Jesus strove to achieve that supreme understanding that surprises the spring within the spring.

He prayed for strength.

Was the message a summons from His Father?

Hunger, intimate as one's shadow, was ever with Jesus — thirst that would not be denied was a constant flame seeking to be quenched. The two great needs were a threnody in major and minor, always in the tortured background of his thoughts.

He thrust them further back by the power of his will. What mattered hunger and thirst? What mattered the

thousand and one discomforts of the body, when the undying echoes of that Voice were ever with him like the eternal reverberations of Divine thunder! But the meaning? Why had it been so phrased as to strike the most recondite chords of his heart?

Jesus had a momentary vision of John haggard and dishevelled, standing by the Jordan. He remembered the flitting criticisms that rose in his mind. He would not have performed the baptism thus; as for John's doctrine of the wrath to come — was not His Father a loving Father? Was it not more in keeping with the secret dictum of his heart that His Father should bring solace and comfort to the bereaved and the sorely oppressed?

And yet, the greatness of John was unmistakeable. Perhaps, Jesus thought, it had been a moral lapse on his part, thus to criticize the Baptist. A momentary lapse in which one makes mistaken comparisons. John's mission was to clear the field, to prepare men's hearts. Who was he to condemn, to criticize? It was an instant of self-doubt, there in the desert gloom peopled by the mysterious whispers of the night.

And yet, and yet the Voice of His Father echoed a message of approval: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Had it implied that, in the baptism, Jesus had set his feet on a new road that led henceforth away from all that simplicity of life which Jesus loved? Was he to go one step further and proclaim The Kingdom of Heaven?

It was then that the recurring meaning of John the Baptist's epochal answer, rang in Jesus' mind, "One mightier than I cometh the latchet of whose shoes. . . ."

Jesus wondered, was he the one chosen by His Father

to succeed, to carry on beyond others? He tried to thrust away the awe inspiring thought.

Light-headed from hunger, burning with thirst, all the voices of the body clamored for ministration. He sensed more than heard an ironic whisper asking him to command the stones of the desert to become as bread, even as John had told the Pharisees that God could raise children up from the very rocks unto Abraham. But Jesus held back. In his semi-delirium, the power of his will remained intact.

"What?" inquired the voice with subtle irony, "Dare you not demand it? But you have the right! Were not the People fed in the wilderness? How much greater right have you who are His Son! Command that stone to become as bread."

Awakening as if from a dream to the full lucid power of his mind, Jesus felt he had been tempted by the Adversary. In the extremity of his physical need, the soft voice filled with undertones of mocking laughter had tried to lull him into a trap.

"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God," Jesus replied. He felt strength begin to surge through him again. The intense lassitude, the weakness was already leaving his exhausted body as if an unknown radiance had become part of him.

"The stone remaineth a stone, but he hath answered me already, and His voice was my sustenance," Jesus thought.

The night had deepened during his travail. Still no sign had been given unto him. But already the darkness was being driven away by the dawn. A paling of amethys-

tine mists began to swirl in the east, heralding the coming of another day.

Jesus walked slowly to where he had found a tiny bubbling pool, crystal clear, that overflowed into a silver thread that only a few yards away was swallowed up by the sands.

He drank deeply of the cold, invigorating waters; then performed his ablutions. In minutes, the skies were ablaze with scarlet and gold, as the sun rose swiftly, flooding the desert waste. The desert wind was already rising, and fine sand swirled on Jesus' robe. He wended his steps towards a towering crag that reared in the near-distance, and climbed the rocky sides until he stood on the summit, protected from the sun by an over-hanging ledge.

From this vantage point he could see for many miles; the air was cooler, and here in the shade he could meditate while he fasted. It was the first time Jesus had so subdued the flesh. But while the previous night he had felt the bitterness of exhaustion, a curious exaltation was now a part of him.

As the hours dragged slowly, again the weakness came. At times he felt he dozed away for a while, then awoke again. Above him the desert skies were filled with constellations blazing with cold fire, adding to the infinite loneliness.

"Loneliness?" Again the ironic voice like an echo on the wind. "Loneliness when you can be surrounded by the greatest of men? Look!"

And Jesus saw himself as a prophet in Jerusalem. He glimpsed the golden roof of the stately Temple, and the

multitudes within and without. The air was filled with the fragrance of incense. . . .

But even then, Jesus murmured: "For it is written, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'."

The temptations were increasing, as if the Adversary were employing against him all the dark powers at his command. Jesus longed for the beloved hills of his native land, the long, ineffable hours in self-communion, stretched on the carpet of flowers and yielding grass, with the song of the birds in his ears. He longed to return to the peace and simplicity he had left behind.

But the real test was yet to come. It was the third, the most harrowing temptation. As if in a dream he sensed himself being transported to the pinnacle of a lofty mount. Below him were spread all the empires of the earth. The East of the Magi, who at his birth were guided by the stars; the West . . . the power and the glory of the great kingdoms of the world.

All that was offered him and more — dominion over myriad beings of earth. A wondrous vision as only the Adversary could make it.

Perhaps if he took dominion over the world and its unhappy multitudes, he could lift them up. The thought was insinuated into his mind. *How much, how very much He could do for the love of men!*

Power beyond the dreams of the greatest tyrant. Wealth beyond the imaginings even of Rome. It was an overwhelming vision that struck at the very roots of Jesus' heart, for the love of his fellow man was part of his very life. And yet, the subtle fiendishness of it! *The love of man!*

Jesus had never felt the weakness of the body with

such agony as now. He had never felt the fever dull his will thusly; his senses reeled, and the night was peopled with phantoms and shadows like the wraith-like miasma of a swamp spewed in the night.

With a tremendous effort he summoned all his power and tottering to his feet he cried: "Get thee hence, Sathanas. For it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve!' "

Trembling, completely spent, Jesus stood against the rocky wall of the crag, supporting himself, breathing heavily.

Jesus was really alone now. The phantasms had dissolved into the darkness, their voices stilled. Only the frosty brilliance of the stars illumined the wan features with their silver luminescence. Even the soughing wind was stilled as Jesus strove to recover his calm, and at last he lifted his head toward the silent heavens.

He murmured a prayer that was an exhalation of his heart, and then turned to descend the rocky height.

For forty days he had endured, and now he retraced his steps and returned to the world.

VI

"I am a voice crying in the wilderness," John had said. But long since the wilderness of the desert had been left behind.

An incredible success attended his mission; pupils flocked to him by the score, and wherever John went, multitudes gathered to listen to the young prophet.

Following in the true tradition of the Prophets, John became increasingly a censurer of the priests as well as the authorities. There was no injustice which his eagle eyes did not spy and expose; there was no iniquity but it was impaled in the passionate protest of his voice. The Jordan was covered with pupils on all sides, and men and women of all ages walked miles to hear this austere prophet who voiced all their Messiahnic hopes.

His fame went far beyond the borders of Judea where Pilate forbore to punish the anchorite shrugging his shoulders at this latest Jewish phenomenon, "Another lunatic!" He had exclaimed laconically. "What is another lunatic among the thousands I have to rule!"

But John felt his mission was still far from being accomplished. There was a grim determination in his heart to spread the tidings, if need be, to the far corners of the earth.

In the end, it was found to be not necessary.

John left Judea, going beyond the border into Perea where the tyrant Herod Antipas sat precariously on a throne that was ready to fall apart. His wife Herodias who hated Judaism with a fanatical hatred, brooded on the inferior position of her husband, and wove a series of intrigues calculated to make Herod and herself sovereigns superior to the rest of the family.

She gave Herod no peace. For having no peace herself, in the passionate, violent and ruthless organ that was her heart, there was no room for anything that did not contribute to her towering ambition.

Herodias was beautiful, but for the marble-coldness and hardness of her mind. She was one of those women who are the epitome of sex, and can render a man helpless with the power of their bodies. And Herod was already feeble — feeble of will, and sapped by excesses. There was nothing he could deny this daughter of Herod the Great. Their marriage was almost an incest, for Herod Antipas was her uncle.

And into this web of tyranny and intrigue, where injustice was too commonplace for mention and iniquity the order of the day, the clarion voice of John the Baptist was raised in anathema against both Herod and Herodias. There was no compromise. For a long time there had been conflict between the irreligious, blood-stained dynasty of the Herods and Judaism.

And now John came, surrounded by multitudes, to give voice to all their grievances and impale the tyrant on the condemnation of the Baptist.

Perhaps the pussilanimous Herod Antipas would have stayed his hand contenting himself with the dispersal

of the followers of John the Baptist and having the latter returned whence he came. But not so Herodias. Her fury knew no bounds when John raised his voice against her.

She despised the Jewish laws, and in John the Baptist she saw merely one more enemy to be disposed of quickly. To her mind, it was unthinkable that this gaunt and dusty charlatan should dare even to mention her dynastic name. And thereafter Herod did not know one single instant of peace or comfort.

"Have him arrested . . . have you lost your mind?" Herodias asked him innumerable times each day. "He is inciting the rabble to revolt, and you sit complacently doing nothing while the storm gathers! Have him put to death!"

His will was no match for hers.

Herod sent his officers and soldiers to arrest the Baptist and had him imprisoned in the palace dungeon.

But if Herod had no peace before, he was now to have gehenna on earth. For from the depths where he had been consigned, the 'Great Voice from the wilderness' continued to censure and decry, until the very stones of his dungeon vibrated with John's denunciation.

"Kill him . . ." Herodias had demanded in desperation. "Kill him and have done with him!"

But still Herod stayed his hand. He could not, he just could not bring himself to give the order for the execution. It was the awe of a coward for a man of indubitable courage. Confronted with the valor of John the Baptist, he found himself unable to act.

Not so Herodias. She was determined to have John's blood. In her fertile mind, only one thing was lacking — an opportunity, something that would force Herod's

hand. Had she had the authority to condemn the Prophet to death, his voice would have been stilled long ago.

Meanwhile John the Baptist's following instead of diminishing, continued to grow. Money was found to bribe officers of the guard and sentries, so that he was able to communicate with the outside world. John never knew how the way had been eased so that his imprisonment would be robbed of its power to isolate him. He inquired after Jesus, and kept abreast of the events of the day.

Outside the populace was seething. It was said that Herod feared to put John to death lest there be a popular uprising.

Finally, after Herod's first wife, the Arabian Princess, daughter of Hareth, King of Petra, had fled to her father's territory because of Herodias, Herod had John imprisoned in the fortress-palace of Machero. From there John held daily correspondence with his disciples, and daily lifted his voice against the Herods, the authorities, and the welter of iniquities which was the leaven of his day.

Day by day his profound belief in the coming of the Messiah grew apace, and he sought to discover a sign, an indication of the event he had so long heralded and to which he had consecrated his life. John hoped that ere his numbered days were ended, this divine dispensation would come to pass. In his dungeon of darkness, it was like a profund illumination; in his moments of despair, it was the divine consolation of the Lord.

When Jesus emerged from the desert, it was the summer of the year twenty-nine. His friends — in reality disciples who had listened to his discourses and interpre-

tations — had already made known the sojourn of Jesus in the wilderness. The forty days he had spent in solitude, in the rigorous fast made necessary not only by tradition, but by the very nature of the waste in which nothing grew, had already been bruited about by them.

Already popular imagination had begun to embroider on what Jesus must have undergone in this desolate and horrible land. But of all this, Jesus was ignorant.

He only knew that by the grace of His Father, he had survived the supreme ordeal. But was it supreme? He only felt that a sign — *the sign* he had hoped would be given him, had not materialized. True, he had resisted all temptation, he had been sustained in those dark and lonely moments when the body could not stand the exhaustion and privations any longer.

But Jesus was still perplexed. Something was lacking, some definite, irrevocable sign that would point the way in unmistakeable manner.

And in the imprisonment of John the Baptist, he found it.

Jesus had taken a different route than the one by which he had entered the desert. Perhaps he did not wish at that particular moment to encounter John. Perhaps he wished to return to his home as quickly and quietly as possible. But it was not to be, for no sooner had Jesus emerged from the desert, than a confused group of villagers rushed to him with the saddening news.

Herod the Tetrarch had sent his minions and thrown John into a dungeon. In the uproar of voices, all trying to tell their version of the arrest at the same time as the others, Jesus caught a word here and there that laid bare the pattern. Herodias had demanded it! Herod was

uneasy and feared sedition. John had inveighed against their marriage . . . truly, it was incest, was it not? The phrases seemed to fly like startled pigeons.

But through the sadness in Jesus' heart, one burning thought flashed through his mind like unleashed lightning. Could it be? Was it possible that this was *the* sign?

Suddenly a great conviction became part of Jesus. The conflict which had tortured him for forty days and still had perplexed him upon leaving the desert, was over. His Father had given him the sign. It was he, of whom John spoke. It was he who was to establish the Kingdom of God. The thought that he was to be the doer of His Will, became absolute part of Jesus' being. No longer could there be any dubt. What questionings and soul-scarchings could he engage in, when here was the sign he had asked of His Father?

In his intense emotion, the chiselled features in the emaciated face seemed to take on a majesty — a grandeur that awed the simple shepherds and villagers who gathered around him — they scarcely knew him in this sudden transformation from the affable, loving friend whose very voice had been music.

"One mightier than I cometh!" The great prophecy was still ringing in his ears as Jesus turned away, and began the journey back to Nazareth.

On the way to his home, Jesus' mind seethed with the import of the revelation. He knew that only an infinitesimal fraction of the whole was known to him as yet, that the entire, the tremendous truth would be unfolded to him. All the latent powers of his being seemed

to have developed. A great, a profound calm returned to his troubled spirit.

The conviction that it was his mission to establish the Kingdom of God had now taken so complete a possession of his mind, that henceforth the entire course of his life was to be devoted to this task.

Jesus had no taste for politics; there had been too many examples of failure with regards to popular uprisings. No, his supreme originality went beyond the mundane liberation of the shackled and the oppressed. From that moment on, his original doctrine of the ideal kingdom — the doctrine of the absolute liberty of the soul, took root. It was a refuge where no tyranny, no injustice, no force could intrude. With superlative surety, Jesus intuited that his was to be a moral revolt. Only thus upon men and by the help of men, could he carry out the will of His Father.

It was to be that ultimate idealism that found concrete expression in the Gospel of the poor, in the good tidings of the Kingdom of God; in the conception of the "Son of Man."

Henceforth, the inward tides of his sublime conception would be given to the world. These things and more were passing through his mind with the characteristic humility typical of Jesus.

He was nearing thirty, the age when youth no longer seems unending, and when the poor, transitory passions of the heart begin to pall. But there had been no earthly passions to soil his. No love save that of his fellow man, and greater still the love of God. Jesus had never married, although Jewish law enjoined it — almost demanded it. It had not been for lack of attraction on the

part of others, for women loved him — loved the purity of line of his features, the wealth of chestnut hair and the tall slenderness of his body — the eyes that mirrored all the kindness and nobility of his nature.

When he reached Nazareth, Jesus found that Mary, his mother, was at Cana together with his brothers. Cana was not far, a little more than a few miles to the north. They were attending a wedding feast — a welcome break in the placid monotony of their existence. Jesus mentally visualized the age-old tradition. There would be music. the ululating sound of flutes, and the brazen clangor of cymbals. The women would wear their brightest costumes, and the simple gaiety of the guests would be heightened by draughts of wine.

The harshness of the desert seemed a world away in this flowering land, and the prospect of relaxation was inviting. And so Jesus attended although he was tired from the journey.

As he neared Cana, he could hear voices singing, and the tinkling sound of laughter in the distance. He smiled softly, for joy was a part of his nature, and even the harrowing experience of the desert had not robbed him of the capacity for it.

Jesus arrives at the feast. His wan features, his body emaciated by the rigorous fast, seem austere and forbidding to the guests. This is not the Jesus they remembered. They know he has spent forty days in the desolate wastes, and wonder what change has come over him. Some who had been laughing as Jesus entered, stop in an uncertain note, and those who had been dancing, stop as the flutes dwindle to moaning minors and are still.

James, his brother, perhaps a little more courageous

than the rest, tries to restore the atmosphere of gaiety, and asks Jesus with a smile: "Well, art thou not going to tell us of the baptism?" Another guest, perhaps thinking aloud, remarks: "The wine is finished." But Jesus makes no answer to either. He does not know why, but in the midst of gaiety he feels withdrawn and aloof. Where is his capacity for simple joy, his genius for identification with the soul of man?

Mary, sitting at the table, gazes at him with concern. He looks so thin and forlorn. Her heart goes out to him. But what to say, how draw him away from the mood that seems to possess him?

At last she says simply in a soft voice: "They have no wine."

The sound of her voice shatters his reverie. And yet Jesus still feels like a stranger in the midst of his family and people whom he has known all his life.

He turns his head slowly, and his own voice sounds strange in his ears as he replies, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?"

What it had taken many draughts of wine to accomplish, Jesus' few words dissipate in an instant. The ensuing silence is as startling as his words.

Mary's cheeks lose their robust color. As if inspired, she says to the servants: "Whatsoever he sayeth unto you, do it!" Her hands twine and untwine nervously like lilies bending before the wind.

But the guests are not only silenced, they are astonished. They had been used to the eternal amiability of Jesus; in fact, they had so often thought him a little queer because he never became angry, never quarrelled or sought to show of his learning of the Scriptures. They

had smiled condescendingly at his habit of spending his evenings on the hills, instead of on the more immediate, and to them, more important mundane pleasures.

And now he had returned from the baptism and the desert, clothed in a forbidding dignity they could not understand.

Calmly, as if nothing had happened, Jesus directs the servants to bring the water pitchers. He feels a great, an all-encompassing power. He can look into their hearts, and he knows that now he can guide them, even command them. He orders the servants to fill the pitchers with fresh water. This is done. When the water is poured from the pitchers, there flows rich, red wine.

It is the first miracle of Jesus. But it gives him no satisfaction. He is still prey to the inner urge that makes him leave the feast and return to Nazareth.

It was at Nazareth, the beloved home where Jesus had spent the happy years of his childhood and adolescence that he commenced his ministry.

But to the blind who could not see and the deaf who could not hear, another obstacle — perhaps a more insuperable one — was added. For to the villagers who were accustomed to seeing and speaking to Jesus' mother, Mary, and who daily brushed shoulders with his sisters and his brother James, it seemed incredible that they should have harbored without knowing it, a great teacher with a mission in their midst. At first they were merely astonished; later they plainly refused to believe, and even opposed him openly — some of the more antagonistic going so far as to counsel violence.

It was then that Jesus wryly pointed to the proverb: "A Prophet has no honor in his own country." Perhaps

he sighed wistfully at the strange obstinancy of these simple people; perhaps he felt that this minor difficulty was but a negligible test. At any rate, he left Nazareth behind and travelled to Capernaum, as humble, as little known as Nazareth.

With what mingled feelings he put behind him this placid, happy epoch of his life. But there was no turning back. Already his disciples had increased and his teachings were sought by some of the public, despite the opposition at Nazareth. The nature of his mission was becoming increasingly clear, as the great inward unfoldment brought forth his sublime originality.

VII

The blinding blueness of the sky was reflected on the untroubled waters of Gennesareth; a few aquatic birds volplaned leisuredly, emitting plaintive cries.

Rising from the sandy shore, a cluster of white houses shaded by olives and fig-trees, and the grape-laden traceries of vines, offered a pleasant contrast to the lake. In the center of the village, stood a rectangular building whose carved portico was decorated in the current Greek style. Within, there were the customary seats and a special chair reserved for the reader; a closed cubicle contained the sacred scrolls. There were no ornaments, no statues of any kind. Its extreme simplicity had a severe and uninviting coldness.

This was the synagogue of Capernaum, center of Jewish life; meeting place for the villagers on Saturdays, where ideas were freely exchanged, and *midrash,* or homily, offered by the reader, who usually expressed his own interpretation or conception, and was open to the questioning or criticism of his audience.

There was no priesthood. Anyone who desired, might stand up and give the *parasha* and *haptara* of the day.

It was the Sabbath. Already groups of the faithful were beginning to converge on the synagogue. But already

a stranger stood tall and poised and unhurried in the doorway.

There was an indefinable air of greatness, of innate nobility about him that instantly drew the eyes of the villagers of Capernaum. They saw Jesus as he paused, smiling faintly, just before he entered the synagogue.

When the "elders" and the *hazzan* arrived, he told them his name was Jesus — Jesus of Nazareth. The hazzan was a little puzzled. Nazareth! That was a little town but a few leagues distant, and yet, he failed to recall having ever seen this tall, slender stranger who unconsciously walked and talked with the poise and bearing of a king.

But custom was too deeply ingrained in the *hazzan's* nature for him to make a departure. He offered the book to Jesus who, unrolling it, read the *parasha* and *haphtara.* Then folding his long slender hands before him, began to give the men and women of the assemblage his own interpretation of the lesson.

In all their experience they had never heard such a voice, low yet vibrant, weaving a mesh of melody in which the parables he chose for them, went unerringly to their hearts. These were simple farmers, fishermen, housewives and artisans, and a leaven of youth with merry eyes and joyful minds, always ready for a laugh or something new.

They had never heard this kind and joyous Gospel of Glad Tidings, and unutterably tired of the involved, pedantic homilies of the Pharisees, they found a vast and potent charm in the words of Jesus. They listened in unbroken silence, as if robbed of speech, as the cadenced

phrases fell one by one into the waiting cup of their simple hearts.

But there were others, too, who listened in growing wonder at the young teacher. For this small village on the northern shore was like an oasis on the great caravan route to Damascus; wise men learned in the arts and sciences of the heathen; pious faithful learned in all the exquisite intricacies of the law; charlatans and demagogues and adventurers, and wealthy travellers in search of pleasure and profit. All passed through this crossroad asking news and giving theirs in exchange — so many of them visited the synagogue.

All of them are aware that Jesus is not an accredited teacher, he wears neither phylactery, nor the four-pointed fringe required by the law. They know he is not a Baptist, for he neither wears a hair shirt, nor does he speak like one. Had anyone ever heard a Baptist proclaim any 'glad tidings?'

And his message . . . they forget he is not an accredited teacher, that he is but an humble carpenter of Nazareth, a village not precisely held in high esteem by them. They forget a great many things, for Jesus is speaking, and in tones of unearthly beauty, he is illustrating *in their own language,* a message of hope.

And as Jesus stands tall and slender, his sensitive features even more refined by the recent ordeal in the desert, his large dark eyes, slightly sad, ineffably kind, sweep over his silent audience. Something seems to flow from the young speaker to his listeners. It is something intangible, unseen — something that is felt like an inward glow, akin to happiness and perhaps to peace. And in

turn from the audience itself, the magnetic outflow returns to Jesus.

In their great simplicity, they sense in Jesus all that they have hoped for in a teacher, for as yet there has been no revelation of his Messiahship. Theirs is the simplicity of the humble, and Jesus from the divine understanding of a higher plane, meets them across an invisible bridge.

Jesus is speaking in parables now. It is the beginning of the deathless parables of the Master. He is reaching out to touch their inner being and help them to shake the lethargy of their souls. His eyes increase in brilliance, and against the thin, pale cheeks framed in the chestnut hair, they seem to burn luminously. His face is thus transfigured.

"*Behold, the sower went forth to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them*: *and others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth*: *and straightway they sprang up . . .*"

As if with one accord, the audience leans forward listening to the parable, for never has it heard anyone speak like this. Jesus is touching their lives, in a language whose sheer clarity all of them can understand. And yet, they know he is speaking of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus speaks to the fishermen in terms of myriad fishes caught by that ultimate net which is the Love of God — to the farmer in terms of harvest and seeds — to the housewife about old garments which should not be patched with new cloth. And the miracle is that these intimate and simple things that are the daily, the commonplace experience of their lives, become clear and

beautiful as if Jesus had endowed them with a new, a greater meaning.

There are moments when Jesus' voice rises vibrant and full, like the tones of a cello, when he emphasizes the relation of the parable to the Kingdom of God.

"What manner of teacher is this?" The *hazzan* whispers to an elder. This unaccredited stranger is not like the members of their village, who offer their simple and halting homily at the close of the daily lesson. No! This stranger aims at far greater results than the mere reading of the book!

Jesus annoys them deeply. The last thing they wish is to have to share honors with an unheralded and unknown stranger from Nazareth, who so quickly and so thoroughly has captivated the townsfolk. The *hazzan* wears a thin, frigid smile on his lips, in direct contradiction to the frown of annoyance that creases his brow.

The elders are perplexed. What can they do? Nothing has been said that can be censured. Despite themselves, the parables have fascinated them. They glance uneasily at the *hazzan*.

But the latter stares moodily ahead. He is convinced that Jesus like many another clever charlatan, will try to get into the good graces of the villagers and thereafter by the gift of his tongue, manage to live without effort on the fat of the land. It irks him that anyone from outside should encroach on what he considers his territory. With a pang of intolerable selfishness, the *hazzan* wonders if Jesus can raise a following that might eclipse *him!* The thought is so overpowering that in his nervousness he coughs convulsively. And as if his cough had been a signal, a harsh cry rises from the back of the synagogue.

There is a momentary silence, and then the activity of startled people as they turn in their chairs, stand and try to find the cause of the disturbance.

A member of the audience, a young man in his late twenties, has fallen from his chair in a seizure. A thread of foam runs from his parted lips, and the eyes are upturned in the torture of the convulsions.

He shouts, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? Leave us in peace! I know thee who art the holy one of God!"

The sensation is profound. To the townsfolk of Capernaum, this is incredible. And then they feel the icy hand of fear, the horror of the unknown, mingled pity and dread for the possessed. They glance at each other. There is no question in their minds but that a fiend is in possession of the man. The tension holds them in its grip.

For a brief instant, Jesus gazes at the convulsed form on the floor of the synagogue. Slowly an immense pity begins to shadow his eyes. And then, as a clear and pure spring rising from the bowels of the earth flows at last into the sunlight, all the love of his fellow man, which was the secret of his unrivalled understanding, seems to permeate the hall.

There is no hesitation in his steps as he walks the length of the building, the congregation parting to make a path for him. When he reaches the victim, he kneels and grips him with his hands, shakes him. Then gazing at the young man with all the power of his being, Jesus exclaims: "Hold thy peace, and come out of him!"

He continues to gaze as the man struggles convulsively in his grasp. Slowly the attack passes, the tremors dwindle and cease, and finally with a deep and tired sigh,

the young man opens his eyes and tries weakly to smile.

The audience feels it has been present at a miracle. Everyone tries to speak at the same time. The women who have been watching the entire scene from behind the gratings, cannot leave the synagogue fast enough to spread the news of what they have witnessed.

Jesus is very tired. He has spent himself in an outpour of tremendous energy, both in the sermon and later in the exorcism. He feels no sense of triumph, but the quiet need of silence and of being alone. With a gesture of his hand, he forestalls questions and leaves the hall.

Jesus needs that intimate communion in solitude which alone seems to renew his strength, as if the Divine Spirit touched him with its grace.

Behind him he leaves an audience which is not only profoundly touched, but awed with a sense of the miraculous. The villagers, and those others of the surrounding region of which the lake was the mainstay of their existence, were a gentle and peaceful group; living in an earthly paradise, leading a comparatively easy life devoid of privations and great tragedies, their joyous minds and kindly natures being ideally suited for the 'Gospel of Glad Tidings.'

The lake was bountifully supplied with fish, its waters always clear, with pebbly beaches of clean, white sand; the soil incredibly fertile, no depths of poverty had ever embittered their lives. In Jesus they found someone they could take to their hearts. For although, possibly, their goodness did not possess great depth, and their intelligence was really that type of shrewdness which makes for a type of social efficiency that has no need of intellectuality, their impulse was based on kindness, lacking

as they did the instinctive suspicion of the people of Jerusalem, or the explosive temperament of those of Galilee.

These then were the members of the audience Jesus found in Capernaum. He had brought peace to a tortured soul. To the members of the synagogue, Jesus had performed a miracle.

But there was another miracle, a greater miracle which was not to be evaluated until the passing of centuries — it was the beginning of his ministry.

VIII

Never did happiness flow like so much fragrance in the gardenways, as during the stay of Jesus in Capernaum. The many little towns surrounding the Lake of Tiberias, all had their mission which Jesus was able to establish among them. Never was any spot so near to the meaning of paradise, as during this divine unfolding, when the doctrine of 'Good Tidings' took possession of that tiny corner of the earth.

Here in Capernaum, Jesus formed a center, a widening circle that took him to its heart and provided devoted disciples. Unlike Nazareth, Capernaum paid homage to the greatness of his originality. And at the house of two brothers — Simon, surnamed Peter, and Andrew, who had been born at Bethsaida, but had become established at Capernaum — Jesus found abode and their devoted discipleship.

Simon (or) Peter, was already married and a father. Andrew, as yet, had not married and had been one of John the Baptist's original disciples. They were both fishermen.

Among others, Salomé, wife of Zebedee, a comparatively wealthy fisherman and owner of boats, was especially devoted to Jesus. But it was their younger son,

John, brother of James, who was destined from the beginning to play a major part in the life of the Master.

John was one of those beings who remain forever a mystery of nature. Born to parents whose only claim to distinction was the welcome reception they gave Jesus, and who lacked the faintest semblance of refinement, or even an accurate sense of value, John had all the attributes of the true inner aristocrat. He was slightly less tall than Jesus, deceptively slender; underneath the sun-darkened skin, rippled the long muscles of an athlete.

But it was his exquisite awareness of the divine genius of Jesus that enabled him to bring to their friendship, the fragrance of an affection, the basis of an understanding that in the end was to prove epochal.

James, the elder brother, was none the less devoted to Jesus. It was an ideal discipleship; but John and James were as different as it was possible for brothers to be. James was a man of action, whose sheer simplicity of nature failed to entertain — to understand even the spiritual subtleties of John. James was a joyous follower. With John, it was an all-encompassing consecration to his beloved Master, in whose every word John sought to discover meaning within hidden meaning. Ever by the side of Jesus, John was rooted and grounded in a love that transcended without effort the poor, the limited passion of the heart.

But not only among the men did Jesus find devotion and faith. Among the women who surrounded him too, he found a humble abnegation, a deep and quiet love that was manifested in their service — the honor and pleasure of tending him, of listening to his discourses from a respectful distance, added the perfume of a thrill, an

enthusiasm to their sect, which was forever an incentive.

Among them was Mary of Magdala — the Magdalen whose flaming nature was aggravated by nervous disorders that have since been the basis of legends that she was possessed by seven demons, as she was possessed by men.

All these things were known to Jesus. Yet in his maner there was never the faintest hint of reproach. He came to heal, to restore, not to trouble their hearts. Others who were more obscure, followed Jesus wherever he went, recognizing him habitually as their Master. Among them Phillip of Bethsaida; and Nathanael, son of Tolmai of Cana; and Matthew, the publican who had followed Jesus, and was later to give the world his *Logia* — and thus give the basis of what we know of the teachings of the Master. Thomas, or Didymus — the doubting Thomas, who appears to have been (for all his waverings,) generous and warm of heart. And last, but certainly not least, Judas, Judas of Kerioth. He was the only one who was not a Galilean, for Kerioth was located at the extreme south of the tribe of Judah, beyond Hebron.

It was a colorful group, full of fire and enthusiasm. The contrast between the disciples themselves was at times very great, for Peter, whose rugged honesty and frankness were his paramount virtues, was a world away from the lively imagination and exquisite understanding of John. James whose excessive zeal had the quality of thunder, was incomprehensible to the cold, calculating and thoroughly single-minded character of Judas.

They called each other 'Brothers.' No titles of authority, or of superiority were permissible. Jesus alone was the 'Master' — and God alone was 'The Father.' The

only distinction that a member of the group received through circumstances, arose from the fact that Jesus lived and taught in the vessel of Simon Bar-jona. But otherwise, they shared in a close comradeship which prevented any jealousies or friction. Still, there were times when differences of temperament trespassed on the sweet simplicity of their lives.

Try as he may, John was forever unable to stifle his growing antipathy towards Judas. In the large brooding eyes of the young disciple, there was mirrored at times an almost prophetic hatred, a repugnance that was translated into an uncontrollable shudder of sheer repulsion whenever Judas of Kerioth touched him even in the most fleeting of gestures. For the sake of harmony, and perhaps in fear of well-merited rebuke from Jesus, John masked his feelings and held his peace, but the effort was great.

Judas had large, pale hands which he often rubbed together in an unctuous caressing motion; although far from affectionate, he used them in speaking, laying them on the shoulders, or perhaps an arm of the other members of their group. It was as if he sought to place the emphasis of his physical contact — perhaps to make his words more disarming by a brotherly gesture. But something — something intangible, invisible, yet intimately felt, particularly by John, robbed his words of their persuasiveness. It may have been the peculiar magnetism of the man, an aura projected by his real, his inner being, which like a clashing vibration was unendurable to the highly intuitive John.

As for the Master, whose profound understanding of the human heart has had no peer — was it perhaps coincidence that Jesus gave Judas the stewardship of the

flock, making him the treasurer? In their philosophy, a preoccupation with the values of worldly goods, was anything but conducive to the Kingdom of God. Repeatedly, Jesus had cried out against the evils of riches. Worry over their meager funds, over the contributions made by followers and well-wishers, would have been repugnant to any of the other disciples of Jesus. But not to Judas Iscariot. This red-faced, heavy set man, whose small dark eyes lighted up at each fresh contribution, whose pale and restless hands often caressed the leathern pouch containing their few silver coins, seemed to take pleasure in his stewardship.

With what divine, unerring intuition Jesus chose him for the task! But was it intuition? Was it an understanding so profound that it went beyond identification even with the strange and tragic nature of Judas? Or was it an awareness in anticipation, of a plan whose repercussions were to influence nations still to be born? In any event, Judas was treasurer. To the prerogatives of his office, he quietly added others which subtly gave him a pre-eminent place in the group. It was he who arranged for food and lodgings during those journeys from town to town, when Jesus preached throughout the enchanted rim of Lake Tiberias.

Endowed by nature with a robust constitution, a tendency to heaviness, the enervating summer heat reddened Judas' face, and perspiration added an oily touch; his hands as a rule were clammy. It was this unfortunate physical endowment which added to his peculiar personality, added to the unavoidable antagonism between a nature as exquisite and powerful as John's, and that of Judas.

But there were other cross-currents which made eddies and small whirl-pools in the collective lives of the disciples. It is true that they were all 'brothers', neither higher nor lower; the lesser was ministered to by the greater. But because the house of Simon-Bar-jona, surnamed *Kepha,* or Peter, was used by Jesus for his preaching, and was naturally the very center of the crystalline spring which was the Gospel of Jesus, Peter was regarded by the public as a sort of chief, or deputy leader of the group under Jesus. To their simple minds, accustomed to authority, it was natural that someone should be second in command. This public interpretation caused endless embarrassment, for often he was asked to intercede in requesting some special attention from Jesus, more often than not involving the visiting of some ill member of the community. It was Peter whom the collectors of taxes addressed in order to collect their dues; it was Peter to whom even contributions were given for the defraying of their needs.

Judas resented this state of affairs. Was he not the treasurer? Had not the Master entrusted to him the stewardship of the flock? What business had Peter to encroach upon so clearly defined a stewardship as his, which he, Judas Iscariot had thus far carried out so meticulously and successfully!

In vain, the honest and brutally frank Peter, expressed himself on the matter on several occasions. Judas could do him no greater favor than to take care of these distasteful matters himself. But Judas was not convinced. He brooded on both the fancied slight of Peter's authority, as well as on the real antagonism of John, whose profound nature never felt anything by halves. John was like a

great symphony — a symphony that was not to be heard in all its thunderous power until his later years.

And, one more thorny problem intruded upon the pastoral peace of their lives. It was natural that Peter, the Simon-Bar-jona in whose house he lived and in whose boat he sailed the sapphire waters of the lake, should be near to his heart, as were also James — the dynamic, inspired James — and his brother John, whose exquisite heart and marvelous intuition, made him seem almost feminine to many who were ignorant of the profound, repressed power of the man.

And this flavor of a preference, this slight leaning to the three diverse natures, which in their respective ways were so near to him, as facets — indeed — of his own being, gave rise to jealousy.

There was nothing in their immediate present to rear this hydra-head, for they shared alike whatever there was to be had, and the all-encompassing love of Jesus was sufficient to touch each one with its grace. But the jealousy existed — a jealousy of that near, that forthcoming Kingdom of God in which the disciples would be glorified by their nearness of the Master, seated to his left and right. Who would be nearest to the Son of Man? Who would be the ones to receive from Jesus the greatest, the most important trusts?

The inspired, the thunderous James, and the imaginative John, both of whose hearts had been given to Jesus without the least reservation, thought that perhaps they, above all others, had earned this great honor in that other world wherein existed the Kingdom of God. Whether they requested Salomé, their mother, to intercede for them or not is not known; she was a follower of Jesus,

and with that timid daring which is the greatest feminine paradox, Salomé importuned the Master with a request for these two places for her sons.

Jesus gazed at the woman with a kindly, almost an amused smile. For an instant he felt identified with that simple and loving mother's heart in which the vision of two golden thrones, flanking right and left that of Jesus, was foremost. Perhaps his heart went out to her, but it was not his nature to be equivocal. Who knows but that he felt a twinge of sadness at so prosaic a quibbling over the Kingdom of God. He stood tall and slim, brushing back from his face the rich chestnut hair that was forever being blown forward by the fragrant wind from the lake.

His eyes were luminous, as he said, "He who exalteth himself shall be humbled . . ." His low and kindly voice instinct with melody, as he told Salomé how the Kingdom of Heaven will belong to the humble and the lowly. She had expected another answer. But could it be otherwise when this was the very heart of their philosophy? "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth!"

The subtle discontent, the subterranean tug-of-war persisted. Both John and James came in for some censure from the other members of their group. And yet, what could be more human, more ineffably human, than this aspiration to be nearer to Jesus than anyone else?

None of the disciples could be said to belong to any of the higher classes. Most had begun as fishermen, except Levi — later known as Matthew, the son of Alpheus who was a Publican. He of all the disciples, being a customs collector and, therefore, a tax gatherer, was regarded by the orthodox in company with the lowest of criminals, excommunicated and their money accursed — since tax

gathering, except for purposes of the Temple was considered Pagan by the Jews.

Thus it is evident how the apportionment of honors in the Kingdom of God, were intensely the concern of the disciples. All that they had not achieved on earth, was to be bestowed upon them in heaven, glorified by the very nature of the bestower, and the Kingdom itself.

And yet, in the face of such opulence of nature as surrounded them, even these considerations concerning the future Kingdom, could only affect their lives superficially.

For the very climate of Galilee was the nearest thing to the Garden of Eden; the lake of Gennesareth had the finest and most plentiful fish of any. Of all their seven seas, this was the loveliest. The skies were infinitely blue to the horizon's endless rim, and the profusion of flowers were myriad censers that gave their fragrance to the restless air.

They drew endless strength from the brooding mountains, and at night they were incoherent with the nearness of the stars. . . . It would not have surprised them had they discerned the whirr of wings, for they believed that angels came during the hours of darkness to guard the Son of Man.

They had seen Jesus lift his hands which had the strength of a workman's, and heard him say, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Perhaps during these long summer nights, when they slept in the open air, in close communion with Nature, they saw the Kingdom of God coming nearer, and perhaps in their untroubled dreams, carrying him in their hearts, they dreamt that they saw God.

IX

In the lighted chamber where the reeling torches threw in relief the expectant faces, the flashing jewels and artifacts of gold, Herod Antipas celebrated his birthday. It was the year thirty.

Here within the great fortress of Machero, a magnificent palace had been built, of a luxury so lavish as to be almost incredible. Numerous couches had been placed near the laden tables, and servants — even slaves in the pagan manner — constantly replenished them for the benefit of the guests. A complete ensemble of musicians weaved an erotic spell with flutes and reeds, and percussion instruments, while the fragrance of mingled perfumes cloyed the atmosphere.

Reclining on a throne, Herod Antipas drank and stuffed delicacies into his capable maw, while Herodias resting at his side, frowned and smiled at the same time. At last the one — the longed for opportunity had come! Would she triumph with her plan, or would it, like so many others, miscarry before the baffling weakness of Herod? No! This time there would be no possible opportunity for the Tetrarch to deny her desire. Visioning her plan, her smile deepened, and those who knew Herodias, seeing it, turned suddenly pale.

Deep in the bowels of the palace fortress, John the Baptist heard the distant echoes of the feast. He had been told it was the Tetrarch's birthday. A profound bitterness had possessed him for many days, and doubt, too.

To what availed him to have been a 'Voice in the Wilderness' proclaiming the coming of the Lord, when now his voice was answered only by the spectral echoes of this living tomb. Then, too, he had heard of the astonishing success of Jesus.

John's disciples had brought him tidings of the ministry of this admirable teacher, whose very words turned tears into joy. "Jesus sayeth," they had conveyed to John, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. . ." "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. . ." And more disturbing still, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

They told John of the Parables of Jesus, that priceless style which is not to be found anywhere in Judaism, and which Jesus had devised to reach the people's heart. But most disturbing of all, was their description of the mode of life of Jesus' disciples.

"They live in a constant state of joy and thanksgiving, while their master spreads the Gospel of 'Glad Tidings,'—" the informant had said.

To John the Baptist and his followers, nurtured and grounded in a taciturn and ascetic atmosphere of fasting and interminable prayer, this atmosphere of joy, this travelling about Galilee in what amounted to an endless feast, was astounding in their eyes.

For with supreme disdain, Jesus showed his contempt for the conventional disapproval of his time. He never sought the favor of the mighty or the rich. Their regard

for the social rules and regulations of the period was the subject of his supreme contempt. It was another sign of his greatness, of that imperishable originality which was the hallmark of his genius.

On one occasion being reproached for keeping the company that he did, Jesus answered without hesitation, "The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him."

The chosen disciples of Jesus were a heterogenous group that would have perplexed any moralist. It perplexed John the Baptist, who sent one of his most trusted disciples to ask of Jesus the ultimate question.

The man John sent was a symphony in brown, baked to a mahogany hue by the desert sun. All corded muscles and ascetic fleshlessness, he approached Jesus without trace of a smile. It was a sharp contrast — the disciple of John the epitome of austerity; Jesus benign, joyful, radiating that love of the people which enabled him to have the spirit of humanity live in him. They eyed each other in the small silence that ensued.

"Art thou he that should come?" John's disciple inquired of Jesus, "or do we look for another?"

Doubt in Jesus' mind had long since passed. The gradual unfoldment of his inner self was now complete. Jesus did not answer him directly. Would a categorical assertion supply the lesson which must be learned?

By what signs would the coming of the Kingdom of God be known? The healing of the broken and the sick? The tidings of salvation to be made known to the poor?

John's disciple himself ennumerated the signs that preceded the coming of the Kingdom of God. And who

but Jesus had done all these things and more? Had he not turned water into wine at Cana? Had he not restored the tattered and pitiful legion of the ill? Was not his 'Glad Tidings' the very Gospel of the poor?

John the Baptist in due time had his answer. He remembered the Master as Jesus of Nazareth, the humble carpenter, who had stood with the perplexing dignity of a king by the waters of the Jordan awaiting baptism. He had later seen Jesus retire into the desert to endure the forty days of fast. This, this was the Messiah who was for to come. But into these momentous cogitations, at the very moment when it seemed to John that his monumental work of 'making straight the way of the Lord' had been accomplished, a mundane element, as casual, as ruthless, and as inevitable as death, intruded upon his meditations.

Too long had John decried marriage to Herodias as an abomination; too long he had inveighed against the pagan tendencies and leanings of the Tetrarch. He had incurred the undying hate of Herodias, whom John had demanded Herod send away, and the enmity mingled with fear, of Herod himself. Now one of Herod's palace guards was at the door of John the Baptist's cell.

John turned his head to gaze with brooding eyes at the guard, revealed by the resinous flame of a torch. It was a moment when John was praying for enlightment to the Lord.

To his untamable nature, this long imprisonment was more than he could bear; he had endured the depths of a bitterness which had been as a volcano in his breast.

He was to be free at last, free in that greater freedom which cannot be encompassed on this earth. The guard

hesitated for a moment as the cell door was opened. Then he went in.

The moment came for which the entire assemblage is waiting; yes, even Herodias. The cimbals crash and the flutes and reeds ululate in a wailing rhythm that has all the seven devils of passion in their depths, and slowly, undulating her hips, and swathed in veils, Salomé comes into the great hall. A vast sigh escapes a thousand throats, for Salomé, daughter of Herodias by a previous marriage, is one of those women who can bear her sex like a beacon. She pauses briefly before Herod in a slight obeisance, smiling inwardly at the light of lust that comes into his narrowed eyes.

Herod waves a hand in a royal gesture: "Dance Salomé!" He smiles. Herod notes the transparent veils, and feels a surge of blood to his temples at the curves the diaphanous garments reveal.

"Will you grant me a wish?" It is Salomé speaking with the air of a very young girl. Herodias' eyes grow cold with expectation, and one hand goes to her breast as if to stifle the loud beating of her heart. Both mother and daughter sharing the same plan, see Herod's head nod in assent.

Perhaps it is the awareness of triumph that lends wings to Salomé's feet, that adds a quick and joyful tempo to her dance. But never has she danced as well — the veils fall fold on fold, and on a pause, embrace the amber body with the somber hair; from the reeling torches there falls a shower of sparks that scorches only less than the glances, and senses reel and flesh is in the air.

"Grant me," Salomé asks breathlessly, "John, the Baptist's head on a silver charger!"

"John's head?" Herod Antipas' eyes hold a hint of horror. All that spell of voluptuous beauty woven by her dance is gone, dissipated by the ghastly request. Death is no stranger to Antipas, he has decreed it many times in the past, yet he has never been able to rid himself of awe of the austere and uncompromising John. But the eyes of the audience are upon him. He has granted a wish, and a royal promise cannot be broken.

Herod knows only too well he has been trapped; a glance at the eyes of Herodias which hold the cold, fixed glance of a serpent, tell him the story. At last he yields and sends a guard with the charger to the dungeon below. . . .

When the Baptist's head is brought on the dish, and presented to Salomé, she holds the charger for an instant and looks dubiously at her mother who had planned the whole thing. Herodias averts her eyes.

The divine herald is dead. The thundering voice is forever silenced. But strangely, amid the perfumes and the viands, and muted wailings of the flutes, the echoes of the forbidding voice are still heard; they seem to fill the palace hall — the memory of his tall, ascetic body with the flaming eyes, to fill the minds of all. Suddenly they have no taste left for the rare wines, or the succulent delicacies.

Herod rises from his throne; his lowering brow is forbidding for he feels a rising fear in his heart. Herodias lifts a hand, and questioning eyes, but thinks better of it and lets the hand fall.

Petulantly at finding herself without the august pres-

ence, Salomé wraps her veils around her with a gesture and leaves also, while the assembled guests look at one another in apprehension.

But it is Herodias to whom the emptiness of her victory is most apparent. She has silenced the voice, and her hatred has been appeased, and now that the deed has been done, there is a hollow feeling in her breast; paradoxically, she feels as if her victory had been in the nature of a defeat.

But the greatest defeat was yet to come, and here at the palace fortress of Machero itself. But of that, Herodias could have no premonition. She only knew that the fierce joy she expected to feel at the sight of the Baptist's head on a platter, had failed to materialize.

The great anniversary of Herod Antipas' birthday was suddenly at an end.

The Elias who was for to come, once more was gone.

Behind him, John the Baptist left a controversial storm. Was he Messenger of whom Malachi the prophet had ranted with such vigor? Was he the Jeremiah whose constant thunders of protest while on earth were believed to have been translated to Heaven, where he spent an eternity of prayer before the throne of God?

But on one thing they were all united: His exemplary life, his genius for self-denial — his single-minded opposition to the established order of the day, was an exact parallel to the legendary figure of Elias.

It no longer mattered; once more the blood of a true prophet had stained the land of the Chosen People. It was the immemorial price exacted by Israel. It was to be exacted again with miraculous results. The storm was gathering, but there were no eyes to see, no ears to hear;

all that was the Law and the Prophets was to be submerged beneath the coming avalanche.

In the meanwhile, the disciples of John the Baptist requested the poor, dismembered body of their leader, and it was granted them. To be rid of that fearful head, of the very memory of the man, must have been a vast relief to Herodias, not to speak of Herod himself. The disciples buried John according to tradition in a tomb, and wondered what next to do. They were like a flock without a ram; an army without a general. And they had been stunned by this cruel blow that had ended at one stroke, their message, their mission, and their leader.

At last they decided to see Jesus and tell him the news. In their simplicity they were unaware of how great, how truly significant the death of John the Baptist was to be. For John was not only the precursor of an era. He was in the most complete sense, *the first witness to the new Gospel,* and *the first martyr to the new credo.* He was to prove a giant among prophets, whose sense of justice could not be appeased in his time, except for that last and most complete anodyne of all.

The thundering echoes of his voice were to linger down the corridors of time, but of these things the bewildered, weary and disheartened group that marched doggedly in search of Jesus, knew nothing. They only knew that inner agony that gave them no surcease, and was too deep for tears.

At last they arrived dust-laden, so tired that they could hardly stand. Before them was the azure expanse of the sea of Galilee. They saw a great multitude collected by the shore at a distance from them, and perceived beyond the multitude, a boat gently riding the rippling

waves. And then they heard Jesus' voice, infinitely soothing, carried across the intervening distance by the sounding board of the waters.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also. . . .

It was the magnificent parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, which Jesus gave the people in simple words that they could understand. Already the skies were beginning to glow with that amethystine hue which is the precursor of night. In the east, the evening star already pulsed like a beacon of hope. The ineffable harmony and peace of the divine voice, carrying across the darkening waters, seemed to caress the weary group of disciples of John, who had so lately arrived, consoling them and bringing to them a strange sense of peace.

"Blessed are they that mourn," said Jesus at the close of the parables. *"For they shall be comforted."*

Unerringly, it struck their hearts. Was it meant for them? Could it be possible Jesus already knew about John? True, there had been disturbances, as the populace had risen in indignation and anger at the fruitless murder of the Prophet, but how could the news have reached this out of the way corner so soon?

Harsh, austere as they were, and innured to the lesser emotions of the soul, the simple words of Jesus seemed to reach the innermost recesses of their being, for their reddened eyes shone with tears that began to gather and

then welled forth; they were grateful for the growing darkness that hid their momentary softness.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled!"

By then night had fallen and the crowds began to disperse to their respective homes for the evening meal. Only the hushed sussurration of the waves could be heard as the boat neared the shore. John's disciples waited for Jesus. Now they knew a measure of peace; somehow the agonizing after-taste of their bitter draught was gone.

Above them the evening star seemed to be leading the entire constellation in the firmament by its wondrous fire. But John's disciples failed to see it, for their eyes were fixed on the tall, slender figure who followed by a small group, was alighting from the boat. It was Jesus.

This was the man who upon being bluntly questioned at John's order, had replied by asking what were the signs that foretold the coming of the Kingdom of God, and who had indirectly pointed to the miracles and cures attributed to him with a stately pride and kingly dignity that had chilled the messenger sent by John.

This was he who had said, *"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me!"*

And yet, how differently he had spoken today! Could this be the same Jesus? There had been no trace of that austere pride which had clothed him on that occasion — none of the commanding mien and harsh authority. On the contrary, this Jesus had been all comfort, all solace and understanding today before the silent multitude. They felt that Jesus' very words conveyed something of the Kingdom of Heaven unfolding from his heart.

One of John's disciples spoke timidly as the Master

approached, flanked by Peter and John and followed by the others. "We come in mourning, for John is dead." And the tale came tumbling from the disciple's lips.

It was a moment of sadness for Jesus, of profound sorrow. Once more the way was clear. But at what cost! Ever since he had forsaken the placid existence he had led in his mountain village of Nazareth, to be baptized by John at the Jordan, and then enter public life, it seemed as if each step in John's life-road, marked an epoch in Jesus' destiny.

It had been during baptism that Jesus had heard his Father's Voice. It had been John's arrest that had supplied the sign. And now, John's brutal murder had rent aside all his hesitations, pointed irrevocably the way forward toward the ultimate goal. Henceforth only one course was open to Jesus.

The merging of the two schools, that of Jesus and of John the Baptist, was inevitable. John's original renunciation had paved the way, and now his death consummated the fact. Gladly, most of John's disciples joined those of Jesus. It was a period of vast unrest, for the murder of John had deeply stirred the multitudes who considered him a holy man; in Galilee, zealots had armed themselves and journeyed to Jerusalem where they had attacked priests of the Temple itself and insulted the Roman guards. They had been pursued and arrested for the most part by Pilate, and thrown in prison. In Siloam, the tower had crashed to earth and buried a score under the debris; a vast sandstorm had lashed the palace fortress of Machero and piled dunes in the courtyards. Everywhere the expectation of a coming Messiah had risen to fever-pitch.

And against all popular sentiment and belief, against even the prophecies, the priests, the rich and powerful, fought unendingly against everything that might mean abdication of even an iota of power.

To the Pharisees and Sadducees, the theory of the coming of a Messiah held the glittering promise of freedom from the Roman yoke. But in their minds, this portentous *coming* never meant that *they* should give up, or sacrifice anything. It was unthinkable. Paradoxically, they were eager for the Kingdom of God, but were unwilling to make any contribution.

For this reason, the Messianic theory was wondrous as long as it remained a theory. But its reality, heralded by John and finally centering in the person of Jesus, was the very last thing in the universe they were willing to accept. Thus the death of John would have occurred despite Herod, or Herodias. For weeks and months the authorities at Jerusalem had been demanding that an end be put to the protests and accusations of John. The element of truth in the voice of John the Baptist was too distasteful to the arrogant Doctors of the Law in Jerusalem.

Fearing bloodshed, aware that his task was but begun, Jesus took his disciples with him into the desert; it was a large following, for to his own had been added John's disciples, besides the many who chose to follow him. How this multitude survived the privations and rigors of the barren desert, remains a mystery. Miracle or not they lived to emerge from the desert fired by an enthusiasm, a conviction of the divine nature of their leader, which had first been expressed by Simon Bar-jona-Peter, in the

words: "Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." In answer to Jesus' question, when the latter had asked in a moment when his listeners had failed him, *"Will ye also go away?"*

X

It was past noon. The slanting rays of the sun drew a golden aureole from the silken shawl on which she lay, and burst into flame in the dazzling glory of her hair.

Her name was Mary. Her mother was a Galilean who had never married, but whose endless succession of lovers had enabled her to achieve a reputation of piety, so generous was the regularity of her offerings and sacrifices to the Temple. Mary had been born in Magdala — born in secret to prevent scandal, and thereafter had been raised by her own mother as a ward, who told everyone that Mary was the orphaned child of a sister.

It had been years since Mary had thought of her mother; she had forgotten her as readily as the Persian merchant who had left the priceless shawl on which she slept, after arguing all night between embraces, in an effort to convince Mary to follow him.

Mary was one of those children who betray the Aryan blood in Galilee, for her eyes had the luminous color of fresh violets, and her hair was an immense cascade of curls and ringlets that reached to her knees. It seemed to have a curious life of its own, with myriad pinpoints of light that reflected the sun in ruddy gold. Her satiny skin had the delicate color of ivory, but with undertones of

pale rose, especially where the curves of her slender body melted in the small rounded breasts and long, sculptured thighs.

She had been barely eleven when as she played with a group of children on the grass and wild flowers of the hills, she had wandered into a grove to stare curiously at the half-nude form of a young shepherd who slept; the advanced afternoon had waned and the other playmates went home to their evening meal, leaving Mary behind. At last, sensing a presence near him, disturbed perhaps by the fixed stare of the child, the shepherd had awakened. At first he had only been amused at her questions, enjoying her ringing laughter and innocent abandon, but later, as desire, father of the species, had smiled quietly in the shadows, he had taken her. It was her first embrace. Curiously, she had told no one.

A year later, while bathing in a shallow pool in a fold of the mountains with other children, she had wandered into the tangles of rose laurel and tamarisk, seeking the great, fragrant lilies and wild, mountain roses, and had seen a gaily caparisoned caravan winding slowly along the road below, at the head rode a handsome Arab merchant enroute to Damascus. Without a thought for her nudity, she had run down the slope and out in front of the princely rider to beg for a gift! To the young merchant, she was like a houri of paradise, and swooping down he had gathered her in his arms without halting his horse. Thereafter she had become a courtesan. The people who lived on the shores of the lake of Gennesaret had another name for her.

It was a name whose connotations implied the greatest fall of all; there had been harlots before her — did

not the Temple itself harbor soiled *doves?* But Mary of Magdala was especially despised because she consorted with Romans, and the very gifts she flaunted had been wrung from the people by the conquerors. It was the concensus of opinion that the seven devils that afflicted her were a just punishment for her sins. On the street, housewives drew their shawls across their faces when they passed the Magdalen, and men always whispered ribald phrases.

And as the years passed and Magdalen's body unfolded from the thin, long-limbed immaturity, into the sculptured symetry of exquisite womanhood, the envy of the women and the desire of the men grew apace.

Mary was eighteen when she had first seen Jesus by the shores of the lake. She had tried to come near him and gaze at the already legendary figure of the Master. But the multitude had elbowed her aside with scant ceremony. She was a harlot. What business had she with Jesus? When she persisted, they had laughed at her, and told her to return to her house and ply her trade with the Roman soldiery.

Curiously, their contempt had struck home for the first time in her life; hitherto, she had always had a suitable answer, drawing from her vast experience in handling men. But now, she had remained silent, standing slender and straight, with that incongruous refinement of manner — incongruous in one of her profession, and the strange aristocratic mien that must have been the gift of her unknown father. Perhaps he had been some Persian noble, an Arab prince journeying to Damascus; or a Roman Patrician even — no one will ever know.

But there was something else that perhaps Mary of

Magdala had inherited, something that gave her no peace and was a constant source of horror in her life — Magdalen had convulsions.

At times she foamed uncontrollably at the mouth, and her limbs became contorted in strained attitudes; often, seized by these ghastly paroxysms during the late hours of the night, her lovers fled in terror, convinced she was possessed by demons.

If her beauty had not been so great, it is doubtful if she could have successfully plied her profession, but her loveliness inspired endless passions, and there were always wealthy merchants and travellers who came on the caravan route to Damascus, who knew nothing of her epileptic tragedy.

By the waters of Gennesareth, at the cross-roads where men of all races and from all parts of the known world came on business and on pleasure, Mary Magdalen laughed and danced the bridal dances of her native land.

In time she learned the rudiments of many strange tongues, and tales from beyond the desert and the seas. She learned the involved and enervating love-ritual of the Orient, and how to read in silence the secrets in the hearts of men. For years Magdalen never knew what it was to sleep alone. Gifts poured into her house. Priceless silken rugs from Persia and Araby, and rare perfumes with which she anointed herself.

To her naturally extravagant nature, money and possessions came to mean very little; the value alone of the cashmere shawl on which she lay, would have kept a Galilean family comfortably for a year. She had gold and silver coins from various realms, and even a shining green

stone imbedded in a great golden medallion, the value of which she did not know.

Her carelessness, her indifference, was a constant source of alarm to the old woman who came to tidy Magdalen's house and help her dress, for the aged servant saw with an eye towards that future when her beauty would become dim and haggard. But Mary Magdalen did not care. It was this very indifference, this surfeit of life that made her lovers more determined than ever to awaken Magdalen to the one thing that had never touched her — Love.

And now at nearly nineteen, Magdalen's life had become a confused, and endless caravan of men.

At last Magdalen rose from the couch, and placed her bare feet on the cool flagstones of the floor; she raised her superb arms above her head and yawned, flexing her torso and stretching her legs and thighs. Her servant had already come and gone, for in a corner of the room stood the great brazen bowl and the ewers of fresh water ready for her bath.

Mary went over to the ewers and poured their contents in the bowl, then she sat in the cool liquid and contemplated herself. She poured water over her shoulders, delighting in the cool caress as the water ran over her breasts and belly; she bent forward and let her hair cascade before her.

When Magdalen finally emerged from the bath, all wet and gleaming, her hair a great wet mass that shone like dark gold, she dried herself carefully with square linen cloths she had filched from a merchant's pack; then, she twisted her hair, wringing it before drying it with the cloths. At last she shook it, spread it and then

passed an ivory comb through to untangle the ringlets and curls that formed as it dried.

With a tiny, razor-edged knife, she scrapped the hair from her under-arms, and from the triangle formed by the delta, so that she would appear virginal. Then she rubbed a light oil over her shoulders and breasts, and the whole room became suffused with the cool, ecstatic fragrance of jasmines. With a small brush and a black paste from the Orient, she darkened her lashes with upward strokes, and finally tinted her already rosy lips. She sandaled her feet, tying the thongs to her narrow ankles, and then enveloped herself in a light blue robe of sheerest linen.

Slowly she walked out of her house into the streaming, late sunshine. She walked aimlessly, for she had no predetermined plan, and as she walked, Magdalen seemed to draw towards her all that burning light, that crystal air of the waning afternoon, and to return it suffused with fragrance. To the Roman soldiers she passed, she evoked those marble Goddesses imported from Greece, which it had become the fashion for the Romans to adore. To the Galileans, she was an inevitable evil which they accept with a grimace of contempt.

But as she walked down the dusty street, Magdalen was scarcely aware of the people or their comments. Her mind was troubled, for there had been an image in her mind, and this image — a man — had been with her for months; this had never happened before. Neither had she ever been able to remember for more than a few hours what anyone said to her. Strange, she could remember the words of this teacher — words that were not even spoken to her, but to the very multitude that mocked and

laughed and would not let her pass when she had tried to draw near to the speaker.

She could remember the occasion and the words as if they had been spoken but a brief while before.

Jesus was at the lakeshore and as she approached he said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

Love? But Mary Magdalen had never loved anyone in her life! She knew instinctively that this stately and astonishing teacher was talking of something far removed from the poor passion of the heart, with which her lovers so often seemed troubled.

She had lingered to listen in the outskirts of the crowd, and had heard a voice tinged with overtones of irony, inquire: "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?"

And the marvelous voice had replied in tones that seemed to fill all space: "I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seven times seven!"

Mary Magdalen had been fascinated by the eyes of the speaker that seemed so dark from a distance, by the sheer majesty that enveloped him in its invisible cloak.

For months the remembrance of that past scene had remained with her, and now that she had heard rumors that Jesus had returned from the desert, followed by his disciples and the multitude that had gone into the desert with him, she was determined to see him and to listen to him again. What if she failed to understand most of what he said? A great urgency seemed to draw Magdalen towards this strange man about whom so many

legends had grown, and to whom so many miracles were attributed.

Perhaps he might exorcise the devils that at times entered her body and tortured her, leaving her at last spent and weak as if she had been debouching for weeks.

She had it from one of her furtive callers that Jesus upon his return had been invited to the house of a certain Pharisee. That in itself was strange, considering that all Galilee was aware that Jesus was an enemy of the Scribes and Pharisees, and had spoken publicly against them. And yet, a Pharisee had invited him to his table! A great perplexity disturbed Magdalen's mind, she could not reconcile all these things — least of all could she reconcile that driving impulse that led her to seek Jesus, without knowing why! She noticed that she was trembling a little, and that her breast rose and fell with an emotion she could not understand, but which reminded her of those almost forgotten first few times when as a little girl she had kept a love tryst.

When she came to the house which had been indicated to her, Mary Magdalen stopped uncertain before the door. Suddenly she was afraid, for she had never entered the house of a Pharisee.

She kept twisting and untwisting the linen robe she wore, until it was crumpled at her breast; her throat felt dry, and her limbs felt weak. She could hear measured tones beyond the door, where Jesus and his host sat at meat. Magdalen lifted her hand to knock, and on an impulse she was never later to be able to analyze, she pushed open the door and walked in.

Before her was a blur of faces surrounding a table, but she found herself gazing into the eyes of Jesus. In that

brief instant before she sank to her knees, she saw that they were not brown, or black, but bluer than her own, a deep, glorious dark blue as the light shone in their depths. She found herself unaccountably kneeling, weeping in uncontrollable sobs, as if the pent-up torrent that had all her life struggled in her breast, had at last broken free.

There was a deep silence. The host had arisen, his face pale with anger. That this harlot, this consorter with publicans and sinners — this plaything of the hated Romans should have entered his house, was anathema. And then, a cold, exultant gleam of hope lighted his eyes. What an occasion! On orders of the Sanhedrim, he had invited Jesus to supper, to make him talk, to trap him that at last they might confound him with his own sayings! And now, this woman was kneeling before him. What would he do? What would he say? Truly, the Lord had brought about in all his wisdom, an unparalleled occasion.

So this is the prophet. Is he not aware that her touch defileth?

And Magdalen, crying as she had never wept in her life, pouring out the whole tide of her long, inarticulate despair, found rest on the feet of Jesus. At last, she gazed about for something with which to dry them, and bethought herself of her linen robe, but that would expose her body; with a quick gesture she unbound her hair and wiped them with the soft golden flood.

Still not daring to glance upwards at the silent Jesus, Magdalen extracted a vial of ointment from her bosom and then anointed his feet. The wonderful fragrance rose upwards like a living presence, invading the whole

house. There was no question that it was priceless, for such rare perfumes were seldom known in Galilee.

Judas Iscariot who was present, half-rose in his seat, and gazed with narrowing eyes at Mary Magdalen; it occurred to him that the sale of that vial of ointment would have brought many a silver piece to their coffers — the waste appalled him. He opened a deprecatory hand and sat back closing his eyes as if in pain.

It was then that Jesus turned smilingly to his host and said: "Simon, there was a certain creditor who had two debtors; One owed five-hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nought to pay he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?"

"Still, Master, they were both debtors — but I suppose, the debtor to whom he forgave the most."

Jesus nodded. "Thou hast rightly judged." His gaze swept downwards to Magdalen.

There was an ineffable quality, something luminous to his smile as he continued; "Thou hast washed my feet with your tears, and wiped them with the hair of your head; thou hast kissed them and anointed them. Wherefore I say unto thee, thy sins which are many, are forgiven thee. For thou lovest much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

Then Jesus arose, and to the horror of his audience, gently lifted Mary Magdalen to her feet. She looked timidly at his face for the first time since she had kneeled before him.

And Jesus said softly: "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith has saved thee — go in peace."

There was a profound conviction in his words.

When she had gone, Jesus turned to find his host, and those of his disciples who were present, horrified and speechless at what they had seen. A woman who had never renounced a single temptation of the flesh; and Jesus whose complete renounciation went beyond their simple understanding, had for a moment touched — been face to face!

They had been scarcely aware of the stumbling flight of Mary Magdalen as she left in the grip of emotions she could not understand, for his parting words were ringing in their ears: *"Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Go in peace."*

It was the most astounding thing the host had ever heard. He almost doubted his ears. Would the Sanhedrim believe him when he made his report?

XI

There was a profound meaning in the words of Jesus when he told Mary Magdalen that her sins had been forgiven her. It was not merely the fact that he had shown kindness and consideration to a woman who in the eyes of his host was the worst of all possible harlots, whose very touch would defile, but that aware of her transgressions, Jesus had publicly stated that her sins were forgiven, a prerogative which until then had been excusively reserved for the Deity.

What transpired that evening at the house of the Pharisee, was but a re-statement of all that Jesus had proclaimed during the many months of his ministry, when he went from town to town along the shores of Lake Tiberias. It was a conclusive re-statement of his Gospel of the poor, of his doctrine of salvation for the outcasts who until then neither sought nor expected justice. The humble, the poor, the numberless victims of social injustices — even the publicans and heretics were to have their day in court. For the Kingdom of God was clearly theirs, and not conceived for the powerful and the rich, of whom Jesus said: "Woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation."

With profound intuition, Jesus knew that the world

of wealth and authority centering at Jerusalem, would never accept his ideas, that the doctrines he preached would be anathema in their ears. It was his unshakable determination to oppose to the bitter end, the unjust and narrow prejudices that surrounded him, and to deflate once and for all, the balloon of Pharisaical piety with the unerring spear of his logic.

"When thou makest a dinner or a supper," said Jesus, "call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbors, lest they also bid thee again, and recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

To the Pharisees who had trumpets blown when they sallied forth to give alms, such a doctrine was little short of scandalous. And yet, they had a precedent for these doctrines of Jesus, for the Book of Enoch is filled with denunciation against all that is worldly luxury and power.

Jesus strove to confirm the divine dignity of Man, and sought the irreducible minimum of the very least among the destitute, the outcasts of the social order, the proscribed and despised, to affirm that they, too, were the children of his Father. His disciples and the multitude that composed his followers were an heterogeneous group with which the orthodx refused to associate. For the Pharisees, immersed in their puerile observance of the myriad distinctions and interpretations of the Law, considered themselves defiled by contact with anyone who relaxed an iota in the observance of the Law of Moses.

The spectacle of Jesus dining unconcernedly with

followers whose reputations suffered from the criticisms of the Pharisees, was a scandal to the doctors.

When they protested at this seeming lack of piety, this wicked affront, Jesus replied: "What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, dost not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing."

For as Jesus often said: "The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him."

Thus at one stroke, in achieving the conversion of Mary Magdalen, in publicly forgiving her innumerable sins, and bidding her to go in peace, he had conclusively demonstrated his teachings for all time to come. Mary Magdalen was destined to be the symbol of how great a love may arise phoenix-like from the ashes of the basest passion. Love, pure and unalloyed with the dross of ulterior motives, was to be the measure by which hearts were to be weighed by Jesus. Not how much one had; not how pure and exalted, but how much did one love, was all that mattered.

Never had Jesus' innate disdain for the trivial moralities of the world been so apparent. The greatness of his originality, had never been so bright, shining like a beacon that drew the despairing and the oppressed, until even those who could scarcely understand the meaning of virtue, were drawn in astonishment before the miracle of Jesus' renunciation of the flesh.

All that were sore and heavy laden, all that hungered for some ray of light in the darkness of their miserable

existence; the victims of a thousand injustices; the weak and the guilty aspiring to remake their lives to their hearts' desire — all began to flock to Jesus to the bewilderment and dismay of the pedantic doctors and scribes who hitherto had ruled these unfortunates with an iron rod. To them, this state of affairs bordered on anarchy, and Jesus was in their eyes a dangerous malcontent and demagogue who strove to turn their orderly little world upside down, where those at the very bottom would be at the top.

Venomously, these narrow and prejudiced moralists of the upper and lower middle-classes, would quote Jesus, saying: "Hath he not said, and publicly: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth'."

But most of all, the great sacerdotal families, not to speak of the Pharisees, resented the aura of simple joy that always surrounded Jesus; the sheer spontaneity of those parables with which he comforted his humble listeners and told them, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

This was too much. How could the authorities prod the laggard and the less strict in the observance of the Mosaic Law, when this carpenter of Nazareth had the effrontery to tell them that if they were persecuted by their betters, they were blessed? Truly, they shook their heads in mock piety, and seethed inwardly without respite.

Both Hanan and Caiaphas, who had thought to stem the rising tide of popular discontent by effecting the death of John the Baptist, with the willing cooperation of

Herodias, were confronted with the vastly more disturbing Gospel of the Poor.

The Sadducees, whose addiction to the good things of the world had led them to disdain the latter interpretations of the Law, became alarmed lest their continuous rounds of luxurious living were to be seriously threatened; and to Pilate, whose tenure of office had been threatened by so many riots and difficulties, this latest movement on the shores of the Lake of Gennesareth, boded nothing good.

"What manner of prophet is this," Pilate asked, taciturn and exasperated at these people of Israel who had a peculiar genius for being in a constant seething turmoil, "who goes about proclaiming that 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God'?"

But there was none to answer him — not yet. In due time the answer was to embody a demand, a demand that eventually was to remain imperishably embodied in the mind and heart of mankind, and for all time to come.

And in the meantime, Jesus went from town to town and village to village, without affectation or external show; dispersing clouds of darkness wherever he went, with his divine gladness, and the unexampled naturalness of his bearing. Innumerable children came as if drawn by a magnet wherever Jesus went, singing and offering him their joyous and innocent *Hosannas.*

Never, perhaps, in all history, has there been an epoch in which such sheer joy has been made manifest; never has there been such wholesale sharing of a divine unfoldment, as during these months preceding the journey of

Jesus to Jerusalem, which thus far during his ministry he had avoided.

Jesus himself had never been so radiant. It was as if he strove to recreate for his followers, through the power of his will and the unrivalled poetry of his sublime spirit, the celestial vision of his Father's Kingdom.

Parable after parable fell from his lips; his dark blue eyes shone with an inner radiance as he stopped along the road at some village and entering a house partook of their hospitality. Soon the entire village had collected around the dwelling, and as many as could went within, the better to listen to his words. Women, divining his complete renunciation of the flesh, felt a curious sense of freedom with Jesus, which enabled them to open their hearts to him.

All Galilee celebrated the coming of the Master, he whom John the Baptist, had prophesied; the Messiah heralded by the prophets, who was to revive the glories of Israel, and be known by his works. Tales of miracles and lengends of innumerable cures preceded Jesus wherever he went, so that the legions of the maimed, the lame and the sick, awaited his arrival in tragic rows.

Jesus ministered to them, although he was more concerned with their souls than with the ills of the flesh; often, he counselled them to tell no one.

But the fame of his works grew with each passing hour, until Caiaphas and Hanan began to receive and hear an endless series of charges and reports.

When the report concerning the incident of Mary Magdalen reached them, their fury knew no bounds. Now they could link Jesus' manifest admiration for John the Baptist, and the declaration of Jesus that the giant of

the desert was more than a prophet, and had nullified the Prophets and the Law, which had only been in effect until he, John, came as a herald of the Lord. For, they reasoned, Jesus aspired to be the Messiah prophesied by John.

How else is it that the disciples of Jesus insist that John was Elias who was for to come? Questioned Hanan shrewdly.

And now Jesus had publicly forgiven a prostitute her sins and told her 'to go in peace,' that her faith had made her free. What next? They asked themselves. But then, had anything good ever come out of Galilee, particularly Nazareth? Was it not a fact that the Galileans were suspected of not being of pure Jewish blood? What manner of a prophet could these ignorant people produce?

But in their heart of hearts they were uneasy. For out of Galilee had come revolt and protest in the past, and witnesses who had seen Jesus and had been present when he spoke, mentioned not only disciples, but of *great multitudes.* If Pilate heard of this and became afraid of rebellion, the blood would run like streams over the cobble-stones, and taxes (and this was what alarmed the authorities at Jerusalem most) would soar.

It was bad enough as it was already, they thought, having to bow to the yoke of these Roman heathens, and pay tribute to a Caesar they had never seen!

Any overt act would bring repressive measures far more severe than those that had preceded them; the Romans knew how to strike where it hurt most, and that was invariably in the purse. No! The last thing that the High Priest and his father-in-law Hanan wanted was another disturbance. For Jerusalem was seething already,

and only the most watchful care, the most delicate manipulations behind the scenes prevented an open break which could only result in far greater losses for Israel.

They wanted freedom from Rome, but were fearful of incurring Roman displeasure; they wanted a successful revolt, yet shied fearfully from the cost; they wanted a Messiah, and were neither willing to accept the Prophet that preceded him, nor the Master that came after John.

What then, did they want?

This was the question that exasperated Pilate. Many a Governor before him had wondered the same thing. As for the Prophets whose blood was on Jerusalem, they long since had ceased to wonder as their flesh turned to drifting dust.

When Mary Magdalen left the Pharisee's house, and the presence of Jesus, she ran blinded by tears in the direction of her home. Like all beautiful women whose very existence, (not to speak of their every possession,) has always depended on their beauty, it had never occurred to her that anyone could possibly think of her except in relation to her body. Not having known any love except the passion of the flesh, she had no idea of a love whose very essence was disinterestedness.

But the complete, the unimaginable lack of self-interest that Mary Magdalen found in Jesus, was like one of those revelations from which the soul never quite recovers. He had asked nothing of her — Jesus had not even gazed at her with that look she was so accustomed to interpreting in the eyes of men.

Intuitively Mary Magdalen had sensed that Jesus

understood far better than she did herself, all the stages of illness in her ravaged soul. And when from the depths of his all-encompassing love, he had raised her to her feet and forgiven all her sins, she had known an instant of ineffable peace that was to remain with her for the rest of her life.

The Magdalen who returned to the small white house with its fruitful vines and fig trees, the borders of vari-colored flowers, and the compartive luxury of her accumulated possessions, was no longer the same. She reviewed with a sense of horror the placid if unmoral existence she had led before, and resolved to sell most of her possessions and follow Jesus.

For an instant a great doubt assailed her. Would the followers of Jesus permit her to join them?

For days Mary Magdalen went through the dark slavery of self-mockery, of doubt and despair, of thoughts which until now had seemed natural, but that in the light of Jesus were unclean. It was a fire that almost consumed her, and yet, that when she finally emerged, had burned clean all the debris of her soiled existence.

Mary Magdalen had gone to see Jesus on a strange impulse, half-seeking, half-sentimental, driven by the remembrance of that day when she had first seen him and heard his words.

She had returned to her home transfigured by an experience that was forever to dominate her life.

When finally Mary Magdalen made her decision, she sold what she could, some she simply gave away. Rumors had it that Jesus had driven the demons from her body, and that she had renounced her former life. Her past lovers were convinced she had taken leave of

her senses, and her refusal even to see them drove them to increase their offers hoping these would change her mind.

Magdalen was deaf to their entreaties. She left her home and went to join the group that followed Jesus. At first she maintained an attitude of defiance, expecting insult and ostracism. But as the disciples, and even the others that formed the increasing followers of Jesus, accepted her without comment, the stiffness, the secret shame left her. She began to find ways and means of ministering to his comfort, of always being near lest she miss one precious word that fell from the Master's lips.

After a time she noted that she no longer suffered from the dreadful convlusions; she felt an immense inner peace — something she had never experienced before. Her eyes grew soft with happiness, as her cheeks grew tanned from the sun and open air in which she constantly lived. Mary Magdalen had never been so beautiful. But now there was a new dignity to her bearing, the fragrance of a new modesty to her mien, that was in itself a protection. The miracle was complete.

For a long time Jesus had refrained from going to Jerusalem, where he knew that enmity to his doctrine would reach its apogee — where intrenched dogma and tradition had full sway.

Still, Jesus was aware that eventually it would be required of him that he travel to that stronghold of Judaism. Jesus remembered those journeys he had made to the Holy City, when as a child he had accompanied his parents in the pilgrimage of the Passover. He retained

a general recollection of grandeur and decadence. He had heard the doctors and the scribes, (the real tribunes and interpreters of the Law and the Prophets,) and had listened to their barren disputes. And now Jesus retained a vague impression of dissension and discord.

Only the great Temple, which at this time was still new, really remained as an impression of magnificence and beauty.

But Jesus knew that his ministry in Galilee was nearing the end, and that the time had come to go to the Holy City. It was a decision that Jesus finally made, not without a pang of regret in his heart, for he was forsaking his beloved hills and the lovely Sea of Galilee where so many months had passed in joy and peace.

Jesus had no illusions concerning the reception he would meet in Jerusalem, but an inner conviction which he alone knew, impelled him once more to visit that city of casuistry and fanaticism — of hatreds and narrow-minded prejudice, where a sardonic and decadent priesthood spent their lives in the endless discussion of minutiae.

XII

It was early spring of the year thirty-one. The wild wind that danced a saraband on the roofs of the *Aliyahs,* swirled raw and chill, moaning a murmurous dirge.

On the tortuous streets, bands of pilgrims wandered amid the confusion of voices, animals and men; altercations and disputes sprang as if by magic, while the shrill cries of hawksters and vendors rose above the din with a metallic edge. As the Feast of the Passover neared, the oriental disorder seemed to increase with the splendor of the arriving caravans. A pungent odor of burnt flesh and incense permeated Jerusalem like a pall from the myriad sacrifices. The houses became full to overflowing, until pilgrims were obliged to sleep wherever they could find unoccupied space.

All races seemed to be represented in that mighty and sluggish stream of people that flowed towards the porticoes and courts that formed the grandeur that was the Temple. In contrast with the arid and stony approaches to the city, Jerusalem was like a jewel. Herod the Great had lavished priceless materials and a very high skill of execution on its buildings, until the Holy City rivalled the greatest metropolis of the East.

Along the packed thoroughfare that led to the courts

and the arcades, rode a tall stranger with flowing chestnut hair, so simply dressed that other pilgrims paused to stare at him and then at the large following that trod behind his mule. The pilgrims nudged one another, expressing wonder that anyone with so large a following should affect such humble attire. They saw the lines of fatigue etched at the corners of his brilliant eyes deepen, as he turned to one of his group who followed close to his mount.

Jesus gave instructions to both John and Judas. He dismounted as he spoke, aware of the difficulty of riding through that chaotic multitude, followed by his disciples and all those others who had chosen to journey to Jerusalem with him.

"Yes, Master," John replied with concern, "but art thou going to the Temple alone?" He noted the lines of fatigue, the air of weariness, for Jesus had not slept the previous night, rather had he prayed until the small hours of the morning, before entering the Holy City. Judas came forward, and Jesus again smilingly nodded before he lost himself among the throng.

"Who is he?" A cold, inquiring voice made John and Judas turn simultaneously to glance startled into the lined visage of a man whom, by his dress and manner they rightly judged to be a Pharisee.

"Our Master, Jesus of Nazareth!" Judas exclaimed unctuously before John could speak.

The Pharisee stood still for an instant as if electrified, then turned without a word and disappeared in the throng.

John gave Judas a quizzical glance. But the other disciples and followers, wondering why they had stopped,

were already forming a circle and asking questions, clamoring for information on a number of things. There was no time; many details had to be attended to, provisions must be obtained, not to speak of accommodations; ablutions must be performed, for they were dusty and dirty from the journey. John raised his hand in an effort to stem the rising tide.

Meanwhile Jesus had gained the lower reaches of the Temple. He viewed the marvelous structures without enthusiasm and without conviction, for he had a feeling they would not long endure; his complete awareness that all the old forms, the material pomp would crumble and pass away, robbed him of admiration for the miracles of architecture.

Jesus felt he was in a hostile and inimical city, where the doctor and the scribe, the *Sofer,* had made a virtue of casuistry, and all humanity had evaporated from the study of the Law; all around him acrimony and fanaticism gave rise to arguments, until the inflated pride of these hair-splitters rose to absurd heights lifted by the elevating power of hot air. The priesthood itself, satirical and cruel, impaled on the sharp lance of their wit, the dress and manners of the pilgrim, discussing with mercenary calm the various values of the offerings, until their prosaic attitude, robbed the pilgrimage of all its charm.

Galileans were the special recipients of their scorn, for since the people of Galilee spoke a dialect of their own, their pronunciation was the object of their laughter.

Jesus strove to banish from his mind these trivial considerations. It was part of the general decadence, he felt. But he had not come to Jerusalem to decry the falsity of its priesthood, nor the barbarous and intolerable pride

of the doctors and scribes, but to attack the very heart of Judaism, in the heart of Jerusalem itself.

All around him were evidences of a commercialism in the Temple that was far from edifying. Shops had been established within the sacred confines, where beasts destined for the sacrifices were sold; money was exchanged at rates that varied with the exchanger, and ever 'doves,' (the sad and wingless doves,) were sold to the highest bidder. A general scurrying after profits, marred the air of sanctity and dignity of the Temple. To the exquisitely sensitive mind of Jesus, this materialism which existed as a matter of course, was appalling.

Jesus and his gospel had nothing in common with all this slaughter; all this buying and selling at the very feet of the altar of God. Nowhere could Jesus find that true piety of the heart that he had conceived for his Father who was in secret. When the lesser officials of the Temple evidenced their vulgarity by their sacrilegeous handling of their various functions and duties, the displeasure of Jesus was complete.

The constant clash of arguments and counter-arguments, the sophistry and casuistry of their views and replies, revealed to Jesus how deeply the corruption of the Temple had progressed. And yet, Jesus spent most of his time at the Temple, although it finally ended by exasperating him.

Jesus wondered in a sort of dazed unbelief whether he were in a part of the Temple reserved for the heathen, the unbelievers, or whether in truth this deafening chaos of haggling and dissention was the hallowed main entrance known as the Shushan Gate, where the uncircumcised were not permitted under penalty of death. With a

growing horror he witnessed the casual disregard for the sanctity of the Temple confines with which the buyers and sellers peddled their wares — the unctuous avarice with which the money-changers demanded one sixth profit!

For the first, and perhaps the only time in his life, Jesus felt a choking tide of rage — a terrible anger that engulfed him in a tidal-wave of fury. With a sweeping gesture of his right arm, he sent the nearest table toppling to the vari-colored floor, and with it the piles of silver and copper, among which glittered gold coins with graven images. Without waiting to hear the indignant wails of the outraged money-changer, Jesus went on to the next table, and one by one toppled them right and left. Showers of coins rang musically on the marble floor, while cries and screams of fright and rage became a crescendo that echoed and re-echoed under the covered hall.

As if in a frenzy, Jesus strode over to where the tethered beasts destined for the sacrifices awaited customers and snatching a whip from one of the shepherds, he turned on the surging crowd of buyers and sellers. Laying to like an infuriated giant, the whip whistled through the air, falling rhythmically on the fleeing backs of traders and customers alike. Liberated doves fluttered in panic under the roof, and the cries and bleats of the animals added to the utter confusion.

At last the hall was cleared, the noise subsided, and in the strange silence, the voice of Jesus could be heard raised in bitter denunciation: "For it is written: 'My house shall be called the house of prayer,' but ye have turned it into a den of thieves!"

The unexpectedness, the incredible surprise has been

such that the guards of the Temple have stood as if paralyzed, while the tall, slender figure of the Master, galvanized by the most profound emotional eruption of his life, cleared the Temple as if of so much vermin.

One of the guards, bolder than the rest, finally approached Jesus. "Art thou possessed?" He asked it curiously, but without violence. "Who are thou?"

Jesus, his raging storm now spent, gazed calmly into the guard's face without making a reply. With the unconscious dignity that was so much a part of him, he retraced his steps and left the Temple.

For the moment he wanted to be alone. The passion that had urged him to cleanse the Temple of the profanation of the money-changers, was something so foreign to his delicately balanced nature, that it left him pale and shaken. He had used up in a few moments the tremendous inner reserves of energy and power with which his nature was endowed.

When he finally found his disciples, who had been anxiously awaiting him, Jesus walked in silence to the dwelling secured by John. Peter was filled with questions, but one glance at the grave countenance of the Master deterred him. All of them were silent, except Judas, who was filled with the delight of the sights and sounds of Jerusalem. It seemed to Judas that he had been ages and ages away from all that color and splendor. At last, even his voluble spirits were silenced.

To the throngs who had witnessed the unprecedented actions of Jesus at the covered hall of the eastern entrance, Jesus was another prophet, perhaps, some austere desert-dweller who had been outraged by what to them was a daily commonplace. Some had laughed, and some

had maliciously enjoyed the fright and indignation of the many traders and money-changers who had been driven from the Temple. Their usury was such that no one had any sympathy for them. Nevertheless, it was not long before the tale went the rounds of Jerusalem, exaggerated and magnified an hundred-fold.

But there had been one who had witnessed the episode, one who stood among the highest in the Councils, and whose lofty and noble mind had been captivated by the moral indignation of Jesus. He had heard of the Master, for the Sanhedrim had many spies who travelled the provinces and brought back detailed accounts of conditions and trends. This then was Jesus. This was the teacher who had travelled the length and breadth of Galilee preaching the Gospel of Glad Tidings.

The witness who in silence had seen what had transpired, was named Nicodemus. He was a man of medium stature, built sparely, but with tremendous breadth of shoulders which made him seem heavier than he was. Throughout the scene, Nicodemus scarcely moved, although one word from him, had he revealed his identity, would have sent the guards in to arrest Jesus.

It seemed to Nicodemus after Jesus had gone, that something almost radiant had left the Temple. His glance travelled the length of the vast hall, now deserted, down the seried ranks of pillars lining the corridor to the Holy of Holies, and for an instant, he felt the brooding peace of the Temple, which until now had been marred by the clashing of the sellers and money-changers, and the haggling penury of the innumerable buyers. Only the pungent aroma of the animals and their debris, remained. A few released doves fluttered still uncertain where to

alight, and the gentle whirr of wings added, rather than detracted from the stillness.

Nicodemus felt both sympathy and admiration for this daring teacher — admiration because he understood the motives that had impelled Jesus, sympathy because Nicodemus knew only too well the extremes to which the Sanhedrim (not to speak of Hanan and Caiaphas,) would go to neutralize such dangerous originality. Nicodemus knew that Jesus' was a costly victory, for in driving the money-changers from the Temple, Jesus had impugned the Sanhedrim and the Priesthood, who were responsible for such conditions.

As for the traders and the money-changers, they could not believe either their eyes or their ears. Could it be possible that they, they who paid for the privilege of transacting business according to age-old regulations had been driven from sanctuary with a herdman's whip? But the welts on their backs and arms were a mute, an incontrovertible evidence, that only served to enrage them further. They had been whipped like slaves!

When they finally re-grouped their ranks and returned in a body to the Temple, Jesus had gone. Once more the cacaphony of their voices became a shrill and offensive pattern, to which the lowing of the cattle and bleating of the sheep was like a pathetic obligato that restored to the Hall, its normal and accustomed disorder.

Meanwhile Jesus had temporarily forsaken Jerusalem. With his disciples he had gone to the Mount of Olives. Needing once more the restorative effects of communion with nature, he found in the limpid air of the Mount, the sunshine that, filtering through the ancient olive trees,

made green-gold patterns on the earth, a great sense of calm.

It reminded him of the placid days in Galilee, of his beloved hills carpeted with wild flowers, when the nearness of the stars was breath-taking, and God the Father was an invisible presence that was felt like hidden music. Surrounded by his disciples, ministered to by Mary Magdalen, who had learned to serve him in silence, knowing that eager friends had prepared shelter and food in loving kindness, Jesus once more reconstructed that perspective that was the very heart of his doctrine — the perspective of *another kingdom* — and which had seemed momentarily obscured by the hateful realities of the Holy City.

Broodingly, Jesus walked among the silver-green foliage of the trees, meditating, followed by his disciples. All of them were disturbed at what had happened. Had their mission failed? They wondered. Had the journey which was to present to all Israel the 'Glad Tidings' once and for all been doomed to failure by the affair at the Temple?

Of all of them, Judas of Kerioth was the most disturbed. In his emotional nature he magnified a great many times the possible damage that the actions of the Master had caused. But he dared say nothing. Inwardly he mourned the losing of such a great opportunity. Would there be another one?

As the disciples rounded a turn in the narrow path that wended among the silver-green olive trees, they suddenly found themselves before Jesus, who was seated on a large boulder.

The Master's dark blue eyes shone as if with an inner

radiance; he was smiling faintly, his right hand resting lightly on his knee, while his left was unconsciously pressed to his heart. Marvelously expressive hands of Jesus, long and slender, yet strong with the strength of those who have earned their bread by the use of their hands, as had the carpenter of Galilee.

Jesus motioned for them to sit around him in a semicircle on the lush grasses of the ground, under the shade of the olive trees. When they were seated, Jesus began to speak to them, explaining some of his parables, and adding new ones to those they already knew. The freshness of his imagination, his vast magnetic charm, slowly recreated for them the idyllic days at the lakeshore by the blue waters of Gennesareth.

Even Judas felt the spell of the melodious voice, the exquisite feeling of peace and harmony that Jesus evoked. Judas wondered if all his fears had not been foolish fears. What if Jesus had driven everyone from the covered Hall of the Temple and incurred the wrath of the priests. Once more he felt the security that the nearness of the Master had always inspired.

Simon, he that was called Peter, was rapt; the words of Jesus were like wine to his strong, forthright nature. John and James, the two brothers listened in smiling silence. In the background were the women, the sun betraying Mary Magdalen as it flamed in her tawny hair. Thus Jesus calmed their fears, and prepared them for what the future was to bring, lending them of his inner strength from that inexhaustible spring of his heart.

That night they rested at Bethany. The disciples exhausted from journeying and walking, slept the sleep of the just. They believed that Jesus slept as they, for

he must be tired even beyond their weariness. But Jesus spent most of the hours of darkness in prayer, communing with his Father who is in secret, praying for guidance. For here, in this noisy city of materialism, where an almost epicurean priesthood sneered subtly at anything and everything that had nought to do with their eternal hair-splitting, Jesus felt uncertain. But during the quiet watches of the night, the original strength of his resolve returned to him.

With that transcendental intuition that made him see the future with uncanny clarity, Jesus sensed that he was to be tested to the utmost. But he was ready. Spurning all religion that did not spring from the heart, he could see the puerility of the formalism at the Temple, which relied entirely on exterior strictness for salvation. It left literally nothing worth mentioning to that truer dictum which is the humble aspiration of the heart.

The next day bright and early, accompanied by his little band of disciples and followers, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. Enroute to the Holy City, others who were not his followers joined the group, eager to see and hear this man who had the courage to do at the Temple what they themselves had for so long wished to have done.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees who also for so long had viewed with misgivings his ministry from afar, were already preparing a reception for Jesus. All their wit, all their cunning and dexterity in the task of confounding a dissenter, was being prepared for the Master. Once and for all, the great malcontent had to be neutralized.

Nothing so crude as an arrest for interfering with the rules of the Temple, of course. Only too well were the Pharisees aware of how much the sympathy of the public

was with Jesus. It was best by far to confound this daring provincial by twisting the meaning of his own words. Was a Nazarene carpenter, unversed in the subtler meanings of the Law and the Prophets to stand before the time-honored learning of the Pharisees. It was unthinkable!

When Jesus reached the Temple accompanied by John and Peter and James, and Matthew, and the ever-present Judas who followed them at a slight distance, Jesus took the western entrance this time. He did not wish to face again the acrid odors and still more acrid voices of the legally constituted money-changers and vendors. He had come to preach his Gospel, and knew that in his audience his adversaries would be present.

It was doubtful if Jesus had any preconceived plan; in the Gospel of Glad Tidings there were no priestly subtleties, no sophistries with which to trap an unwary disputant. Jesus went in quickly, and instantly, the circle of Pharisees closed around him, courteously and deferentially almost, so that by showing him respect at the beginning, the fall of Jesus at the end would be the greater.

It was a ghastly preparation for a trap.

Slowly the Western Hall filled to capacity; a very learned audience was present to hear Jesus; among them was Nicodemus, member of the Sanhedrim. What will Jesus say?

All of them were aware that had Jesus chosen to follow up the advantage he had gained when he ousted the money-changers from the Temple, he could have had an army of thousands of followers at his command, for his act, realizing at a psychological moment the deep, unspoken desires of the people, had captured their imag-

ination. If it had been a temporal kingdom that Jesus wanted, it could have been his for the asking. And they were puzzled. Why did not he seize the advantage?

In their spiritual blindness they were unaware that it was not weakness either of the spirit or the flesh that deterred Jesus, but the conviction that his mission was not bound by the narrow limits of Judea — that his doctrine was not exclusively for Israel. Perhaps Jesus sensed what an inglorious finish it would have been to end his days in the ignoble shadow of a worldly crown.

The doctors and scribes began asking questions in the traditional manner of a Talmudic discussion. Frozen smiles hid the chagrin and rage that the answers of Jesus evoked in their prejudiced minds. The advantage veered first to Jesus' side, then to that of the Pharisees, back again to Jesus.

The audience was delighted for it was aware of the subtle tug of war between the scribes and Jesus. It marvelled at the skill with which Jesus turned their questions upon themselves.

When at last the struggle was in the open and one of the doctors inquired: "Who gave thee the authority to do these things?"

There is but one authority — God. All power stems from Him, and in that rarified atmosphere of sophistry and dialectic, it is not a simple thing to establish a claim to God's favor.

Jesus turned the question into one which the scribes themselves were unable to answer. The gleeful audience glanced at one another in delight. Not for many years had there been such a disputation in their hearing. This

was not hair-splitting, but fundamental truths that were the very core of religion.

At last Jesus smiled at them with a tinge of pity not unmixed with weariness. "How blind they are!" And suddenly gave them a parable which on the *surface* was simplicity itself:

"There was a father with two sons, to one of whom he said: 'Go into my vineyard, son and work;' this son refused to go, but he afterwards upon reflection repented and went. The other son, when also bid to go to work in the vineyard, promised he would do so and then did not. Which of the twain did the will of his Father?"

"The former, of course," the scribes smiled coldly with faint contempt for so transparent a parable.

But before their smiles could freeze on their rancorous faces, Jesus was thundering: "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came, and taught you the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him!"

In the startled silence that ensued, the breath of his listeners could be heard. This was like drawing blood. The insult was unbearable. But the scribes and Pharisees had no time to answer, for Jesus at last made a curious prophecy concealed within the heart of which is the supreme universality of his doctrine.

Not for the orthodox alone; not even for the Chosen People of Israel, but as Jesus said with calm conviction: "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to the heathen, who will bring forth the fruits thereof!"

To their sacerdotal minds, narrowly cultivated in the belief that none but the elect could even remotely be

entitled to the Kingdom of God, this appalling declaration was like a blow. There was nothing to be said, for it was so completely alien to their minds that even its very meaning escaped them. Only the smouldering scourge of anger and vindictiveness remained after Jesus' words had ceased to be even an echo in the wind.

The disciples of Jesus who had followed him to the Temple, were themselves aghast; not that they questioned the Master, for there had been too many parables which although obscure at first had become glorious with meaning when later Jesus explained in private to them. But this! What could Jesus mean? They saw his tired features, the ineffable sadness of his eyes as he intuited their complete misunderstanding of his meanings.

Jesus rose to his feet. With a gesture he let his disciples understand that he wished to be alone, and guided his steps back to the Mount of Olives. The enmity, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, showed him with cruel clarity what a thankless task was his in the Holy City of Jerusalem. The ordeal had left him weary and spent, athirst with the blasting heat of the day.

XIII

But once more, guided by that inner certainty of a mission to be accomplished in that most barren of grounds — Jerusalem — Jesus returns to the city, goes back to the Temple, although now it has become an arena of doctrine, surcharged with hatred and resentment against him. An arena no less bloody because it is all subtle, beneath the surface — and deadly.

His very appearance immediately is the signal for a large crowd to collect in the hall; the public has been with Jesus, for nothing can please them more than to see the arrogance of the Pharisees humbled in disputation. But at the last encounter, some of the doctrines of Jesus spoken in parable have been beyond their understanding, and the scribes have their say. They are past masters at the art of convincing the populace, and rumors are afoot that Jesus has trampled the age-old dogmas of the Holy Scripture. Trampled! In this one final effort they are to see another Jesus in their midst.

Jesus had returned to the Temple imbued with that profound spiritual calm that had been his when he spoke by the shores of Gennesareth. The atmosphere of hypocrisy and hatred that had surround him in the western Hall of the Temple, and that had almost defeated his

purpose, by affronting all for which Jesus stood, still persisted, but it was powerless to touch him. Some of that inner radiance that was like an intangible glow about him, was gone. In its stead was a great determination to carry out that universal will that was part of him, and that Jesus called: "The will of my Father."

Jesus sat quietly, awaiting the moment when the hall would be filled and the questions would begin. Then he rose with a majestic dignity, striking in its simplicity, heightened by the tinge of sadness in his eyes.

Jesus knew nothing of the cabal that had been going on all throughout the quiet watches of the night. Hanan had held a Council, and to the dominating power of that inflexible will, the exquisite genius for intrigue of his son-in-law, the High Priest Caiaphas, had been added. Every question that was to be put to Jesus had been decided upon with cold, inexorable logic — and deadly intent. For once the Pharisees and Sadducees had drawn a veil over their hatreds and rancours, to present a united front against this Galilean Prophet who dared tell the fickle multitudes the verities that must not be interpreted for vulgar consumption.

Only one thing is still in Jesus' favor — the traditional distrust that each sect has for the other. The Sadducees with their epicurean refinement of thought, are furious at being disturbed from their placid pursuit of pleasure; the Pharisees are beside themselves at this country prophet whose interpretations are so immeasurably nearer the very spirit of religious thought than theirs. But to both of their different, yet involved minds, the danger of the teachings of Jesus is great enough to provide an united front. Perhaps Jesus presages a changing order! The idea

sends a cold thrill of fear undulating down their spines.

As the preliminaries are over, Jesus is asked by one of the scribes: "Master, we know that thou are a true teacher, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou: is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"

It has come!

The question is a political challenge, if he says no, his denial will place Jesus in conflict with the Roman authorities. On the other hand, if he agrees, he is going contrary to the precepts of the Scriptures. Only the mind of Caiaphas, spurred by Hanan, could have conceived so treacherous a subtlety.

They are not prepared for the reply of Jesus, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money."

And as they do so, bringing to him a Roman penny, stamped with an image of the emperor, Jesus asks: "Whose image is this? And whose name is written upon this coin?"

From a hundred throats comes the answer in a thunderous shout: "Caesar's!"

"Then, render unto Caesar therefore, the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

It strikes them to their very hearts, for they feel for the moment almost unclean before the sublime trueness and purity of this mind that soars loftily above where they humbly crawl. The populace is silent.

In a phrase Jesus has defined for all time, the cleavage between matter and spirit, and underscored the meaning of the Kingdom of God. What had been a political trap, becomes a lesson from the heart.

Day after day Jesus continues to teach in the Temple; it has become the one chief topic of discussion in Jerusalem. At last, the Sadducees cannot refrain from entering the struggle. They clearly perceive that their enemies, the Pharisees, cannot cope with this man whose interpretation of Scripture goes beyond anything in their experience. Quietly, they decide once and for all to present to Jesus a question which regardless of how he may answer it, will lead him to absurdity and ridicule. It is a masterpiece of craftiness. Jesus has spoken concerning the resurrection. In keeping with their pagan leanings, the Sadducees waste precious little thought on whether or not there is survival beyond the grave. But the theme is admirably adapted for their trap.

Jesus pauses in the midst of a parable.

A Sadducee addresses him in clearly modulated tones which carry throughout the hall in the momentary silence. "Master," the man rolls the word in his mouth with sardonic gusto. "There was a woman, and she wedded seven brothers one after the other, having no children by anyone of them. Upon her death, she meets all of her seven husbands in heaven. During her life she had been a wife to them all. Whose wife will this woman be upon the resurrection?"

A vast intake of breath sweeps the hall like a sigh.

The silence is so intense, it is almost electric. Jesus gazes at the speaker, and the sadness in his eyes deepens; he knows beyond peradventure the depths of guile and venom that has prompted the question. How can he reach these minds who are so greatly attuned to the discords of malice and revenge? How can he reach these souls who are so far removed from all that he would bring to

them? The sense of futility, the appalling acknowledgment of failure — of being so far, so very far from them that there can be no meeting point, lends his face the majesty of sorrow.

When at last Jesus answers, his voice is pitched low, vibrant with all that he inwardly feels: "Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. Have ye not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' My God is not the God of the dead, but of the living!"

Nicodemus who is present, masks his emotion at the sublime answer by a savage frown. His whole nature cries out against this despicable series of traps designed to discredit Jesus.

"My God is not the God of the dead, but of the living!" Nicodemus murmurs under his breath.

He decides to visit Jesus that night. Nicodemus knows what he risks by going to see Jesus. Being a member of the Sanhedrim, Nicodemus is aware of the involved intrigue that is being woven behind the scenes. But there is an urge within him that impels. He feels he must know this prophet better — away from all this malice and hypocrisy.

But the Pharisees are not through with Jesus as yet.

As Nicodemus turns to leave, a scribe inquires: "Master, which is the greatest of all the commandments?"

Arrested in the act of leaving the hall, by the nature of the question, Nicodemus tarries to listen. What will

the answer be? What the very purpose behind it? Surely, everyone knows which is the greatest of all the commandments!"

"Hear, O Israel," Jesus replies.

In that moment he is not only addressing the multitude in the hall, or the swarming pilgrims that fill Jerusalem, or the Pharisees and Sadducees, but all Israel, and the echoes of his answer have vibrated for centuries down the corridors of time.

"The Lord our God is one God, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. But there is a second which is not less great, and it is: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Nicodemus is transfixed, forgetting his disgust at the transparent trickery of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he nods in admiration at this merging of ancient doctrine and new conception of the relation of man to God and man to man.

With a pang of bitterness, Nicodemus realizes what Jesus could mean to the moral and spiritual salvation of Israel; with such a leader, the shackles of Rome would crumble as dust. Others have felt the same in the past. But Nicodemus knows that the Council would never tolerate Jesus. Their palsied grasp on the affairs of Israel could not long endure under him.

Still both the Pharisees and Sadducees fail to fathom the very meaning symbolized by Jesus. In the welter of conflicting emotions, only one emerges and irrevocable: the desire to humble this Galilean teacher, who has flouted their dearest dogmas.

Between the hall of the Temple and the Council,

messengers go back and forth bearing their reports. Their bitterness and even fury at the replies given by Jesus, increases instead of being neutralized by the sublimity of the responses of Jesus. Finally, they send a woman who has been caught in the act of committing adultery. The barbaric penalty for such a crime is death by being stoned.

As the woman is dragged through the streets, the ranks of the accusers is increased by the curious, the idle who feel a thrill of anticipatory pleasure at the thought of seeing a human being stoned to death. Scandal flies on the wings of gossip and the outer court of the Temple is thronged with packed, sweating humanity, as eager to witness the execution as to hear what Jesus will say.

The scribes and doctors grin slyly at each other. 'Now we will see, let Jesus whose forgiveness of sinners is notorious, decide this case.' Their manner of bringing the poor, weeping creature before him is almost triumphal, for they hope with wild delight, literally to kill two birds with one stone.

"Master," the voice of the scribe rings with malicious glee. "This woman was taken in adultery. Witnesses saw her in the very act! Moses commanded us that such should be stoned to death: but what sayeth thou?"

For a fleeting instant, the woman raises her eyes to Jesus, then bends her head. She has had all the changes of torture rung in her soul, has passed from the hysteria of terror at the thought of death to the agony of shame. She is still quite young and comely, her torn clothing and tear-stained face adding to the pathos of the scene.

Jesus gazes with infinite kindness at the poor being now bowed in grief and despair. He looks into the smug,

malevolent faces of her accusers, whose hearts are hardened for the coming kill. In their minds she is as good as dead already, but they have a hope — a wild hope that Jesus in accordance with his doctrine of forgiveness of publicans and sinners will circumvent the Law. Has he not forgiven the sins of an harlot? Has he not supped with the riff-raff of Galilee?

As Jesus remains silent, the accusers impatiently repeat their question, this time loudly, that all might hear. They sense that Jesus is hesitating, torn between not falling into the trap, and his doctrine of forgiveness. But they are wrong, Jesus is not hesitating at all. He is listening to the inner voice of his heart, feeling the true penitence of the woman who has now resigned herself to the ordained fate of all adultresses.

At last Jesus raises his eyes and gazes directly at the foremost accusser, and his voice is instinct with pity as he says: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone!"

The dread conviction of unatoned for sin, which is always paramount in the Jewish mind, is intensified by the reply of Jesus. Not one in that astonishing multitude feels free from sin of one sort or another; the words of Jesus wing like an arrow into their hearts, filling them with that mixture of shame and confusion which is the index of a guilty mind.

Abashed, the sadistic and the curious leave the hall. Even the minions of the Pharisees and Sadducees no longer have stomach to bait Jesus; they are not prepared for so great a nobility of mind and spirit. What is there to say? But of them all, only Nicodemus intuits the true greatness of the Master.

Nicodemus, by virtue of being a rich and powerful Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrim, learned in the Law and the Prophets, should logically have been at odds with the doctrines of Jesus, if not with the Master himself, personally. But the innate sincerity of Nicodemus was such, that he could not but admire Jesus and his profound and pure understanding of the spirit of religion. Nicodemus was too intelligent a man not to be aware of the utter incompatibility between ancient Jewish religious dogmas, and the new doctrine of Jesus; he was too well informed not to be aware that Jesus had preached the abrogation of the Law beginning with the time of John the Baptist. The Temple excluded everyone but the Jews from its sacred enclosure. The Law, hard and unalterable, was only for the progeny of Abraham. And Jesus, in unmistakable terms, stated that every man who accepted him, and loved his Father, was a son of Abraham. Jesus proclaimed the rights of man and the divine dignity of being the children of God; not the rights of the Jews or the dignity of the Jews.

The Kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke, was not exclusively reserved for Israel, but for all humanity. The way thereto was to be found not in a monotonous succession of burnt offerings, and absolete sacrifices, but in the innermost recesses of the human heart. For as Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Aware of all this, Nicodemus could not find it in his heart to condemn the young prophet; sometimes he fell into a meditative mood, striving to ascertain whence came the lively sympathy, the inner sense of agreement in which he found himself with Jesus. A great liberal

himself, Nicodemus often agreed with Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel, whose ultra-liberal views, whose knowledge of Greek and Pagan culture was tolerated because of his brilliant and profound knowledge of scriptures, as well as the fact that his acceptance at court served the purposes of the Sanhedrim. But even the liberal and often almost pagan Gamaliel, was but a diluted shadow in contrast to the revolutionary originality of Jesus.

Against his will, Nicodemus found himself brooding over his inward struggle between all that hitherto he had held sacred as a matter of course, and the dazzling Gospel that Jesus preached — nay, drove home to them with parable and illuminating reply, until all that he said when pieced together formed the startling and original pattern that the humble carpenter of Galilee had brought to the effete and priest-ridden precincts of the Temple.

It was that inner struggle that finally drove Nicodemus to see Jesus, at the humble dwelling prepared by John.

Jesus for his part was unutterably weary — not with that healthy weariness of the body that renders rest a delight, and induces the boon of dreamless sleep — but weary of the spiritual blindness of so many. He had felt their malice and their venom for days, as they exhausted their wits in devising traps and pitfalls to trap him in the Temple. What had he accomplished? Jesus asked himself. Thousands had heard him, and had carried away with them merely a satisfaction at hearing the Pharisees and Sadducees worsted at their own game. More thousands had seen him, and heard him render judgment, carrying

away with them a vague impression of clever interpretation.

But Jesus had not come to Jerusalem for that. In this city of supercilious priesthood, where a subterranean if implacable battle of wits between Sadducees and Pharisees dominated the arena of ideas and religious interpretation, the echoes of his doctrine went unheeded like the music of strings among the blaring of trumpets.

More than ever Jesus realized that between him and Judaism there could be no truce. He despised the meaningless sacrifices that became literally a stench in his nostrils; the hypocritical priesthood was no less a stench to him. And of what good was a Temple that was the epitome of all that was uncharitable?

Jesus refrained from anathematizing Pharisees and priesthood in an effort to obtain a hearing — not the traditional disputation and splitting of hairs beloved of the Pharisees, but a real hearing during which he might bring his doctrine of Glad Tidings to this citadel of twisted dogmas.

And that was the very thing that both Pharisees and Sadducees had in unison vowed to prevent. The unbelieving priesthood had no intentions whatsoever of being exposed; as for the Pharisees, their well ordered if intolerant world, would tumble about their ears, were the doctrines of Jesus to supplant their carefully conceived sophistries. That was the sum and total of their hatred and fear of Jesus.

At last, goaded to fury at the open violation of the Sabbath by Jesus, they believed themselves defied, and began to denounce Jesus in a campaign of defamation and vilification. At last, Jesus accused them of going far

beyond the original intention of the Law; of manufacturing inventions concerning the pure and impure, and falling into superstitious pitfalls.

"There is nothing from without a man," Jesus proclaimed, "that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile a man."

At this the rage of the Pharisees knew no bounds. Ablutions had become so important a part of their casuistries and mental prestidigitations, that to find this, as well as their institution of the Sabbath, (as they knew it,) attacked by Jesus, was too much! The resultant clamor set all Jerusalem on its collective ear.

"Ye, blind leaders of the blind," Jesus replied laconically, "take care lest ye also fall into the ditch!" All the scorn of Jesus for the falseness of their hearts, was contained within the phrase.

And when the Pharisaical campaign of false rumors and slander became more than even he, Jesus, could bear, he told them: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

But there was no joy for Jesus in winning these verbal encounters with his enemies. He had not come to bandy wits with the mentally petrified aristocracy of the Temple. He had come to open the minds and hearts of the people to a new Gospel, and to a new understanding of the meaning of God, and the relations of His children to the Father.

The sense of the futility of his mission in Jerusalem, weighed on the mind of Jesus and saddened his heart. Meanwhile, the legion of his enemies was increasing under

the subtle guidance of Hanan who, from the luxurious security of his home, planned meetings and cabals calculated to undermine whatever progress Jesus was able to make in the minds of the populace.

The conflict became so impassioned, that even the disciples of Jesus became alarmed; they had not anticipated that their journey to Jerusalem would involve something little short of war. Judas particularly was most apprehensive. His past contact with the priesthood of Jerusalem, as well as the methods of the Pharisees, gave him, perhaps, a clearer idea of what they were capable, and consequently, his apprehensions were greater.

He confided something of what he felt to Peter, not daring to confide in the more emotional John or James, and Peter rebuked him, for it was not in his nature to entertain doubts, especially concerning Jesus. Thereafter Judas held his peace.

The skies were deep purple where the stars shone like freshly washed diamonds, and black where vagrant clouds veiled the scintillant sparkle of the distant worlds.

A biting spring wind knifed icily the length of the deserted street, raising a swirling vortex of dust; from the *aliyahs,* the roof-top chamber reached by an outside stair, and usually reserved for guests, of which Jerusalem was full during the Easter week, came the fitful glimmers of light as curtains oscillated with the wind. Now and then, the muffled tones of distant voices could be heard, heightening rather than breaking the brooding silence.

From the corner of another street which intersected the one on which John's house was located, came the soft

padding of sandalled feet, and presently several indistinct shadows emerged silently, and converged on the house of John. They stood for a moment before the house, as if debating whether to enter the dwelling proper, or to go up the stone stair to the *aliyah* where a light was still burning. Deciding on the latter, they ascended the stair, led by a powerfully built, somewhat squat figure whose great shoulders were muffled in a sort of cloak.

As they went up the ancient stairway, they could hear low voices engaged in conversation. The leading caller paused on the threshold to the *aliyah* for an instant and knocked, wishing to make his presence known.

Within the chamber illuminated by a single oil lamp, Jesus was reclining on a rude couch covered with cloths. Settled comfortably around him, were his various disciples. They heard the soft sounds of sandals on the stairs, and later the single knock. John, who by virtue of having secured the house was host, rose and went to lift the curtain at the entrance, and thus was the first to come face to face with their unknown callers.

Jesus did not move, he did not lift his head; he continued to explain the parable which for the moment he had been elucidating to his disciples. It was only when the deep voice of the leader of the group rose in the traditional greeting, that he sat up. When the man presented himself as Nicodemus, a muffled gasp came from some of the disciples, for the name was one to conjure with — a name allied to riches and power. It was as if the Sanhedrim itself had come into their humble room.

It soon became evident from their demeanor, and their silence, that the others who had come with Nico-

demus were retainers, brought along to guard the safety of their master during the journeying through dark and dangerous streets, whence no Jew would venture except for very good reasons. But what could Nicodemus want with Jesus? Had not the Sanhedrim, through its minions, done everything in its power to discredit the teacher from Galilee?

What compelling motive could possibly have driven this powerful Sanhedrist to take such a compromising step? What mountains of prejudice must he have had to level, before arriving at the decision to see Jesus!

In silence they faced each other.

Jesus gazed calmly, almost coldly, upon this man who epitomized in his name and position, all that was deadly in the feud between himself and the Jewish authorities. Jesus displayed no trace of deference, no eagerness in receiving Nicodemus, not even the remotest semblance of elation in the possibility of converting this great Sanhedrist who, in coming to see him, had by his very act acknowledged what effect the teachings of Jesus in the Temple, had had upon him.

It was an instant in eternity instinct with drama, as ancient Judaism came face to face with a new Gospel; as the representative of vested authority met the revolutionary who desipsed it. Suddenly, the voice of Nicodemus, hoarse with emotion, boomed eerily in the narrow room with the shifting shadow-play of the lamplight upon the bare walls, and the shadows of the occupants looming immense.

"We know that Thou are a Teacher come from God." Nicodemus began, and paused gazing at Jesus.

Jesus motioned for his guest to sit at the foot of his

couch, then folded his long hands on his lap, preparing to listen to what this extraordinary man had to say, and waited until Nicodemus had sat down. Waited without elation and without hostility, his dark blue eyes clear and untroubled, as Nicodemus sought the words with which to ask the questions that had brought him to visit Jesus at such a late hour in the night.

Dispersed around them, the disciples of Jesus stood in silence, gazing covertly at the Sanhedrist, or scrutinizing his retainers, but all had the same thought uppermost in their minds.

The journey to Jerusalem had not been a failure after all. For one of the very highest from among their enemies had humbled himself to come and seek Jesus. If what Jesus had taught in the Temple, had impressed one of the experience and mellow wisdom as this Sanhedrist, how many others must have been impressed likewise, others who in the poverty of their spirit, or fearing repercussions, did not have even the courage to come at night, and in secret.

Nicodemus being in the presence of the disciples — not to speak of his retainers who, although so far beneath him as to be almost beyond notice, nevertheless could later speak and distort the words spoken by him to Jesus — felt constrained to chose his words carefully. He had already made the supreme acknowledgement by his very first words. Now, in seeking guidance on what is perhaps one of the most involved and important parts of Jewish theology, he wished to make his words crystal clear, if possible.

He need not have worried on that score. Even had he not spoken at all, Jesus would have known the answers

that Nicodemus sought. His original statement concerning the origin of Jesus' teachership would have been enough. For the old Sanhedrist would inquire concerning the nature of a 'Kingdom' and the entrance to that 'Kingdom' too.

But it was not the Kingdom of the Jews which had long since ceased to exist. Neither had it to do with Rome, nor the empires of the East. Nicodemus was concerned with the 'Kingdom of God' and the door through which one had to pass to enter the Kingdom. Only, that to the utterly Jewish mind of Nicodemus, the 'Kingdom of God' had a meaning, and connotations which proved a barrier to the explanations of the Kingdom of God, and the entrance therein offered by Jesus. True, all the previous conceptions that Nicodemus had throughout his previous years, had been shaken by the teachings of Jesus; the words of the Master in the Temple, had opened up new vistas, undreamed of horizons of thought, which Nicodemus' orthodox mind had tried to grasp. But even these advanced concepts that Nicodemus had finally understood, did not include the condition of moral renaissance, of spiritual rebirth.

Still, with a stubbornness that was an index of his sincerity, Nicodemus strove to understand the meaning of the words of Jesus. The beads of perspiration ran down his face, although the air was chilly. Slowly, Nicodemus forgot the presence of the silent disciples, and the almost petrified retainers. Jesus told him that 'he must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God.' The imperishable truth is behind the allegorical words. Finally, Jesus told Nicodemus: "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

All this was beyond the experience of Nicodemus; in all his Jewish learning, and his dextrous understanding of Scripture, never had he been faced with so profound a mystery. Nicodemus could well understand the meaning of re-birth. But that a 'man must be born from above in order to see the Kingdom of God,' was beyond his comprehension.

On and on the hours passed. The darkness deepened, and the chill wind became icy as it swept in from the desert; the oil lamp flickered and died, leaving behind the odor of its smoking wick. There was no need to replenish it, for the first wan greyness of the morning had swept away the shadows of the night.

Judas had fallen asleep, and Peter nodded in a corner, struggling against the torpor; the other disciples had already descended to the lower chambers, and the retainers of Nicodemus slept unashamed on the floor of the room.

Only John, his beautiful, almost effeminate features pale from the long vigil, his dark eyes bright with intense interest, was wide awake, drinking in every word of the difficult, the delicate lesson being received by Nicodemus, as if he would graven every single word of Jesus in his mind.

Nicodemus was very tired; lines of fatigue, of despair almost, were etched in his rugged face. Never had he found it so difficult to understand; never had he struggled so determinedly to capture, and make part of his experience, a spiritual lesson. Had he but known it, it was the beginning of an ordeal for him — the pangs of that very re-birth, of that 'being born from above' which he was striving with all his heart and all his mind to understand,

under the gentle, the patient, and unstinting teachership of Jesus.

How much of what the Master taught him Nicodemus understood, what part of it remained imbedded in his heart, was to be known later — much later, and under vastly different circumstances.

At last, the interview was at an end. Followed by his servants, Nicodemus left the *aliyah* and ventured into the still deserted street, which the dawn was beginning to guild with the first golden spears of the sun. In the surrounding houses, the people were beginning to awake.

Left alone, Jesus closed his eyes and began to pray to his Father.

XIV

When Jesus and his small caravan left Jerusalem, they left the makings of a tempest behind, but were not to reap the wild wind till later. Jesus had decided to leave the Holy City and return to the shores of Galilee. It was a silent and melancholy group that started on the journey back.

Judas of Kerioth, in whose literal mind *the* 'Kingdom' of which Jesus had spoken , had very literal connotations, was particularly downcast at what had occurred. For inwardly he argued: 'What manner of a Kingdom could it be in which one would render to Caesar what was Caesar's and God what was God's?' For in the kingdom envisaged by Judas there would be no Caesar — in fact the building of *that* kingdom presupposed the ruin of all that Caesar meant, including his yoke upon all Israel. Disgruntled and confused, he went with the other disciples because he could see no other course. But a vast inner resentment grew in his heart, and the dark glances he gave John, who had more and more become with Peter the two nearest the Master, was an index of his thoughts.

If Jesus had any inkling of this, he gave no outward sign; all through the journey he remained serene and

gracious, and what his thoughts were concerning the result of their stay in Jerusalem, was not known save to him.

When the road from Jerusalem to Galilee which they had taken, came within a short distance from Shechem — where the valley widens between the mounts of Ebal and Gerizim — Jesus, who did not entertain the universal prejudice of the Jews against the Samaritans, decided to stop on the left side of the valley where there was an ancient well which the Samaritans regarded as having been given to Joseph by Jacob. Jesus felt weary and thirsty; besides, he did not share the scruples of the Pharisees, who axiomatically stated that 'Samaritan bread was the flesh of swine.'

Jesus approached the well, known as the well of 'Jacob,' accompanied by John, while the rest of the disciples and the now meagre band of followers went on to the town of Sychar to arrange for food, and, perhaps, for lodging for the night. For it was now evening, that placid hour of twilight when night still has not fallen, yet the day and the cares thereof are past. Jesus sat down and watched a Samaritan woman approaching the well from the direction of the fields, to draw water.

When she came near, Jesus smiled at her and asked in a kindly voice: "Give me to drink."

It was a simple request that any thirsty traveller might have asked, yet it evoked a profound surprise from this Samaritan woman of humble station. It was unthinkable that a Jew would address her, or have any dealings with her, or with any Samaritan for that matter. Indeed, most Jews, in travelling between Jerusalem and Galilee, would prefer to make the long and arduous detour

through Perea rather than pass through the land of the Samaritans. And for their part, the Samaritans resenting the contempt and prejudices of the Jews, repaid them with insults and even violence.

This Samaritan woman did not know that one of Jesus' most admirable parables concerned a man wounded on his way to Jericho. A priest passed by and seeing the wounded man turned his head and went on his way; a Levite passed also and did not stop to succor the man; at last a Samaritan who chanced to come by, took pity on the dying man, and approaching him, poured oil into the wounds, bandaged them and thus saved his life.

She only knew that a Jew had smiled upon her with infinite kindness and asked her for a drink of water. She was struck by his dignity, as well as by his stately beauty, and the air of purity which she sensed without understanding

At last, recovering from her surprise, the Samaritan woman asked Jesus: "How is it, thou, being a Jew, of me askest to drink?"

There was no hostility in the question, only a vast surprise.

Despite her ignorance and lowly station, despite all the evil she had heard about the Jews, this woman of Samaria mysteriously intuited that here was no ordinary Jew. She drew the water from the well, and wondered if Jesus was a prophet, while awaiting an answer to her question.

It was not long in coming.

"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The

answer of Jesus left the woman of Samaria more perplexed than ever.

"But sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children and his cattle?"

And Jesus with infinite patience, almost as if speaking to a child, one of his beloved children that so often clustered around him during his travelling around the countryside, replied smilingly: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

There was a profound conviction in Jesus' words, almost indeed as if he were not only speaking to this lowly peasant of Samaria, but to that still cloudy future which since his journey to Jerusalem had begun to take on ominous outlines.

"Sir, give me then this water," the woman answered in a low voice tinged with uncertainty and awe, "that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

But Jesus who had been gazing into the distance, at the fields that extended to the horizon's endless rim, white with the promise of harvest, turned his head and gazed at her.

"Go, call thy husband, and come hither." He said simply.

But the woman answered him: "I have no husband."

Jesus nodded. "Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and him who

now thou hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly."

The woman gasped, her hand instinctively going to her throat; it was incredible that this stranger whom she had never previously seen could possibly know her life so well — unless, yes, he must be!

Impulsively she put her thoughts into words: "Sir, I perceive thou art a prophet!"

And then, as if to ward the usual Jewish rebuke, she tried to anticipate it, and continued: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." There was something of anxiety in her features, and something of curiosity, too, although she was diffident, and still not quite over her profound astonishment at what Jesus had said to her.

"Woman," Jesus lifted one of his hands for emphasis, "believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.

"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

She did not know the sublime meaning of what Jesus said; much of what he said was beyond her understanding. She only knew that for a few moments she had been part of an instant of radiance, and that, although this strange teacher had known of her life, he had not rebuked her. To her it was by way of a miracle that this man whom she regarded as a prophet had not only

asked her for a drink, but had even tarried and taught her, a woman of Samaria, for a little while.

And then the disciples of Jesus, and his followers, were back from Sychar, their frowns of astonishment at finding their Master talking with a Samaritan, serving as an index of their feelings. Although they made no comments, the woman knew the usual attitude Jews had for Samaritans, and taking up her waterpot, she fled into the city, eager to get away from the disciples, and more eager still to spread word of what had been said to her.

". . . in spirit and in truth!" The phrase lingered in John's mind.

All the while he had remained in the background, silent as usual when Jesus was speaking. It seemed to his sensitive and analytical mind, that the very heart of eternal religion had been laid bare in those few prophetic words. He favored Jesus with a glance of such pure love that it was akin to the devotion of worship.

But already the other disciples were intruding, importuning the Master to eat some of the meat they had brought, concerned as they were with the fact that all through the weary day Jesus had fasted without saying a word. They beheld him pale with fatigue, and doubtless hungry.

Jesus waved their offers aside; there was a greater hunger, that, in speaking to the woman of Samaria, had been miraculously appeased.

When Jesus finally arrived once more to the shores of the lake in Galilee, scene of that sweet, pastoral life which had witnessed the beginning of his ministry, he no

longer retained even a shred of faith in Judaism. Revolted by the barren casuistry and dogmatism of the Temple at Jerusalem, sickened by the unmitigated venom of the Pharisees and the sacerdotal families, he devoted his tremendous enthusiasm and ardor towards crystallizing his ideas into phrases of admirable clarity.

Jesus had no illusions concerning The Law. It must be entirely abolished — and what was even more important — by him! The Kingdom of God would be revealed — and he would reveal it. It was as if the relentless struggle he had undergone in Jerusalem had steeled him to this supreme effort which was to last the better part of a year and a half, until the year thirty-three.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, a seething maelstrom of outraged pride and hatred fanned to white heat, was already sending its tongues of flame in the direction of Jesus. John the Baptist had been a great problem, the members of the Council reasoned, but he had merely taken the mantle of Prophet and had been disposed of in short order. But Jesus! The Pharisees and Sadducees were not quite certain what sort of mantle Jesus was to wear.

They were soon to learn.

A new light had appeared in their midst, a light so dazzling, that all that had preceded him, and were to follow him, would pale before its matchless radiance.

Spies were dispatched in the wake of Jesus and his followers; synagogues were visited with definite instructions. It was a battle to the death, without question or quarter, for the authorities at Jerusalem knew now that they faced a being, against whom their intrigues and traps were powerless.

They had used their sharpest wits to confound Jesus, and had instead been confounded themselves. Enmeshed in their own nets, only the blood of Jesus could possibly appease the evil emotions that his contempt for their hypocrisy had aroused.

Everywhere they fomented slander and enmity against Jesus, and even money exchanged hands more than once. In Nazareth, where Jesus had once preached, tales of his consorting with publicans and harlots were given a dubious meaning. It was told that he gave preference to harlots and sinners in the Kingdom of God, and that he and his disciples were often under the influence of wine.

They went so far as to spread tales concerning the luring of men's wives into the crowds of followers, and hinted at dark practices and worse.

Pointing to Mary Magdalen, they exclaimed: "See! Have we not told thee?"

But all these poisoned shafts of slander and ridicule missed their mark, for Jesus, whose divine irony had burned to the very marrow of their bones, answered them with parables, with a sublime core of justice that struck his enemies dumb.

For as Jesus said: "Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing by himself, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying: God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Jesus felt incomparably free. His mission had at once become infinitely clear, and infinitely part of him. Hereafter every word, every gesture even, was to have meaning.

Surrounded by peril, knowing his life to be in danger, and conscious of the smouldering volcano of rage he had left behind at Jerusalem, he strove with increasing activity to complete the task he had set before himself.

Often he confided to his twelve disciples — and in particular to Peter and John, who were closest to him — plans and ideas that he would not share with the rest of the world. The ineffable vision of the Kingdom of God was ever before his eyes. And the periods of prayer and contemplation increased as his ministry carried him away from Galilee.

His disciples were troubled, and often sought to temper his moods of exaltation in fear for him; they might as well have tried to harness a comet to the hills.

As the struggles of Jesus for the ideal, against the sordid realities around him increased, his preaching became daily more and more exalted, and at times even his own disciples failed to understand him. Jesus' insight into the future had a terrible grandeur, for judging by what he said at this period of his life, it is quite clear that Jesus was aware of the spiritual earthquake he was to cause in the world.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came to send not peace, but a sword."

And again: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?"

And to his awed disciples, who strove to fathom his prophetic words, and wondered if all this were part of

the Kingdom of God: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. Remember the word that I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

It was a warning concerning that future which Jesus perceived with preternatural clarity, and in which, in anticipation, he had already sacrificed his life.

All this filled Peter, who lacked the exquisite subtlety of John, or the inspired mind of James, with dark forebodings. He kept his own counsel, for it seemed to his forthright nature that only with the Master must these things be discussed. But there were moments when he brooded, and feared for the worst.

Judas of Kerioth listened, and went about his tasks as the treasurer of their group, increasingly silent; it seemed to him that the Kingdom of God in which he had aspired to a place of honor, had receeded into the distance. He thought of Jerusalem and its daily splendor with a nostalgic sadness of which he could not quite rid himself.

XV

The surpassing greatness of Jesus seemed to gather an impetus under the new difficulties which dogged his footsteps. His doctrine could not be crystallized into a few catechismal phrases, or neatly pigeonholed with fixed dogmas. His ideas had grown great wings and soared with every word he uttered.

Now, there were no synagogues in which to preach; no friendly villages in which to stop at eventide and sup, surrounded by the men and women who toiled in the fields, and cast their nets in the lake. Only the open sky was his roof, and the fertile earth beneath his weary feet must be his bed.

For six months and more, Jesus was forced to travel constantly, journeying across the lake, finding refuge in the woods and wilderness; even going into heathen territory. At first, Jesus had travelled to the northeast of the lake, to the land of Golan, and to Bethsaida, which being bereft of its ruler — Phillip, son of Herod the Great, had been incorporated into the province of Syria. Here Jesus tarried for a while, finding a measure of peace and freedom from that deadly peril which was the work of his enemies.

Summer was waning, and the first frigid winds were

turning the leaves to polychromatic hues, when Jesus went to Gadara, in Syria, he hoped to gather his inner resources for one last return to Galilee and thence make his final effort to implant that doctrine of 'Glad Tidings,' which his enemies had transmuted into an invitation to death.

Gadara was inhabited mostly by Greek peasants, with a sprinkling of tradesmen and shopkeepers from Damascus. Here, in this southeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus rested and recovered his strength from a summer of constant travelling under pursuit. At first, surrounded by his disciples, and the hardier among his followers — who would have rather left the bloody imprint of their feet among the stones of the road than stay behind — Jesus recaptured something of those first sweet months of his ministry when the multitudes gathered to hear him preach in the hushed peace of the hills, or to hear his voice coming from the lake, carrying across the blue waters the splendor of his vision of the Kingdom of God.

But one day, an anchorite who had his abode among the caves, saw Jesus, and came hurrying up the hillside, rushing through the very midst of a large herd of swine that were feeding in that wild spot. The anchorite was reputed to be possessed, and when the swineherds saw him, they hastened to get out of his path, blanching at the sight of the man's flaming eyes and wild mane. They knew him from experience, often having heard his voice shouting imprecations at them, hurling stones and clods of earth, if they came too near his dwelling.

The swineherds heard him hail Jesus in a loud voice: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee that thou torment me not!"

What strange words were these, even from a madman? The now astonished swineherds gazed open-mouthed at the stately figure of Jesus, who far from fleeing in terror as they themselves had done, stood gazing serenely at the man possessed.

"What is thy name?" Jesus said at last, in a voice of profound authority, yet he said it quietly, very quietly indeed.

Instantly, the madman replied: "My name is legion, for we are many!"

There was a vast, oppressive silence thereafter, for Jesus only raised his hand, and gazed with his sad and luminous eyes at him. Slowly the man seemed to undergo a transformation, the light of utter frenzy left his eyes, his clawing convulsed hands hung limp. Finally the madman sighed like a tired child and sat down not far from Jesus' feet, and closed his eyes.

He did not open them even when several of the swine who had been rooting for food at the edge of the abyss fell squalling into the waters below.

The fright of the swineherd was so great, having already been unnerved by the appearance in their midst of the man possessed, that they broke and fled to the city, convinced that the demons exorcised by Jesus, had entered the bodies of their charges.

Thereafter, Jesus had no more peace for the villagers and townsfolk came pouring out to the mountainside to see him. They found the erstwhile possessed man no longer wild and naked, but decently clothed, quiet and to all appearances, sane. They gazed at Jesus in awe and fear, convinced that he was a worker of dark miracles, versed in strange rites of sorcery. They wanted none of

his gospel, and shut their ears to his words, for they felt that primitive fear of what they could not undestand, which closes the mind to the loftiest counsel.

Fearfully they begged Jesus to depart with his followers, and hoped that neither he nor they would ever return. Rumors spread with fantastic speed, and with even greater speed the exaggerations became even more fantastic. Crowds followed Jesus from what they considered a safe distance, watching his every gesture, listening to words they were unable to understand. Until neither Jesus nor his disciples, nor his followers ever had a moment unto themselves.

To the bitter knowledge that they were especially not wanted, was added the increasing discomfort of this unceasing scrutiny. It seemed as if they were ringed by closed minds whose only ardent thought was to have them depart whence they had come.

Whence they had come! Where to — Galilee?

Nazareth was seething, for had not Jesus told them: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor."

And then, he had announced: "Today is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Finally, Jesus had given them the parable of the heathen.

Capernaum? But Capernaum was filled with Pharisees, as was the rest of Galilee, wondering to where Jesus had disappeared and leaving not a single stone unturned to find him.

"The foxes of the field have their holes, and the birds of the air have their nests; but the Son of Man hath

not where to lay his head," Jesus uttered in a moment of bitterness.

But only he, Jesus himself, knew the road he must perforce travel. As usual, he retired to commune in solitude with his Father, leaving his disciples prey to conflicting emotions, and the uncertainties of their new mode of life. At first, when they had been welcome everywhere, when their needs were met by cheerful villagers as if by magic, when each and every word of the Master was spoken of and repeated in every household, they partook of the joy that comes from being loved and accepted. But now, when they were asked to depart, when they had been harried and hounded by enemies who dared stoop to anything, they felt irritable, uncertain, fearful for the life of Jesus himself.

When he made known his decision to return to Galilee, there were no protests, but neither was there enthusiasm or the remotest vestige of joy. It was a barren home-coming. But truly, they had nowhere else to go.

If the small band of disciples and followers wondered what their reception would be upon their arrival, they made no comment. The authorities had had ample time to prepare a reception for them, and in their hearts all of them knew what to expect from the Pharisees.

But what they did not expect was the transcendental power and boldness that Jesus was to evidence upon his return to the scene of his earlier triumphs. Filled with his heavenly ideal, disdaining Pharisaical preoccupations with material interests, Jesus rebuked them unhesitatingly.

The moment Jesus and his followers arrived in Galilee, the news raced with the speed of the wind; all the

communities bordering on the Sea of Galilee were stirred by the tale of his arrival. Instantly, multitudes flocked in the footsteps of the Master, hoping to witness miracles, eager to listen to his words, for it was as if the mere presence of Jesus had stilled the dreadful rumors, and paled into insignificance the whispers of slander that his enemies had had ample time to manufacture.

"He hath come!" they whispered to one another, and nodded their heads sagely as if sharing a choice secret; but it was already public knowledge that Jesus was again preaching by the shores of the lake.

But something has happened. What can be the matter? The great, the ineffable charm of Jesus, who so readily forgave a penitent sinner, the living words of comfort that filled their hearts with so much joy — where are they? Where indeed is the Gospel of Glad Tidings that rang its clarion call across all that blue water, and all that blue sky?

"Master." A Pharisee is speaking, holding his robe in the exact manner prescribed, superciliously pursing thin lips and narrowing already narrow eyes: "When shall the Kingdom of God come?"

Not only the crowding listeners, but the disciples themselves hold their breath, for this is something they all of them eagerly desire to know. The Pharisee has asked the question in irony, but that vast audience awaits the reply with a tangible thrill of hope that the answer will be to their heart's desire.

"The Kingdom of God," Jesus answers coldly, "cometh not with anxious watching, but unawares. Neither

shall they say, 'Behold it is there!' for the Kingdom of God is within you!"

They do not know — tragically, they cannot know that in one sentence Jesus has laid bare the very heart of his doctrine.

But his questioners are not satisfied and ask with scorn, "Show us a sign from heaven."

They have asked for it, and Jesus, with an intensity that awes them, replies: "When it is evening ye say, it will be fair weather; for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today; for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

Jesus' eyes glow like sapphires; the people have never heard him preach with such eloquence and magnetism. His words are like flames, as he pours out all his feelings against the crafty malice of his enemies.

Let the Pharisees exaggerate what he has said and carry their monstrous tales to Jerusalem, and to the Council. Jesus is weary of this cowardly determination on their part to make him appear as a blasphemer. There is a terrible grandeur to his wrath, for now, he knows that the end of the road is in sight.

Jesus has not returned to Galilee to go into hiding, with the furtive mien of the hunted and harassed; no! He has come back with the determination to fulfill that destiny which is part of his chosen mission. And he thunders his answers to the questions of his enemies that all might hear. Loftier and loftier and loftier are his words; there is no compromise in his counsel of perfection.

"He that is not for me, is against me!" Jesus cries in

tones that reverberate on the hillsides and raise echoes from the placid waters of the Sea of Galilee.

And, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this day!"

That is his answer to their whispers and their mockery, their lending a willing ear to the machinations of the Pharisees, and to icy laughter of the envious who hope for his downfall in their evil hearts.

Let them hunt and aim their shafts at their quarry — Jesus is ready as he has never been before. But where is the divine poet of the gentle heart whose humility seemed to gush forth from springs unending? Where is the compassionate voice ever ready to bring solace and peace to the bereaved and the sorely laden?

The disciples of Jesus gaze at one another in astonishment, in consternation!

Can this strange, new Jesus be the beloved shepherd, the tender Master who has healed their bodies and restored their hearts?

Can this be the exalted being who had spoken imperishably when saying: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone!"

There are unheard thunders in Jesus' voice, and a

stern frown between his eyes that reminds them of his words. "Not peace, but a sword. . . ."

Both disciples and multitudes are wondering and disturbed. But if they would look into their own hearts they would find the answers there. For lacking in gratitude and faith, they have forgotten much, and in forgetting, the people are swayed first to one side then the other. Jesus on the one hand, has claims on their hearts, for more than once he has been their refuge. The wily authorities on the other hand, quote the law and point to real and fancied sins of ommission and commission. They say that Jesus and his disciples corrupt the people by example, for they violate the Sabbath and disdain ablutions. Their list is endless for the two great sects — Pharisees and Sadducees are experts at small talk. In reality, the so-called sins are trivial, but the Pharisees are adepts at magnifying minutiae.

Unfortunately, the none too bright fishermen and farmers, and even the tradesmen and shopkeepers, are torn between ingrained habit and tradition, and the Gospel of Glad Tidings, Jesus has brought them, and which represents the first ray of real light in their dull, and monotonous existences.

They forget that Jesus for months has lived among them, the very embodiment of his own doctrines; they forget that in moments of greatest need, the Law and the Prophets have been forgotten, and even the Pharisees have begged Jesus for succor. Tragically, all cares and beneficience Jesus has lavished upon them, becomes dim and far away in their minds. But the harsh clangor of Pharisaical voices is never dim in their ears.

It is their lack of faith. The ease with which they are

swayed, that is like a dagger in Jesus' heart. For he has loved them, each and everyone as children — even now, it is his sublime and for the moment angry love of humanity, that impels him to open their eyes with words of fire.

And yet, the paradox is that never have the crowds that come to listen to Jesus been so dense; never have his listeners packed the shores of the lake, or the foothills of the mountains in so grave a silence as now. They know in their heart of hearts that they have failed him, and they are angry at the priesthood who thus far have never worried their supercilious minds with the plight of the poor; angry at the Pharisees who have planted the poisoned seeds of doubts in their minds. But in the manner of the humble, they are perplexed and inarticulate. They are at the point where the falling of a hair will sway the balance.

But it is not a hair that falls — it is a child. The daughter of Jairus has fallen ill and is at the point of death. Frenzied with grief, knowing not where to turn for aid, Jairus comes to Jesus, and beseeches him to perform the laying on of hands, that she may be cured.

If it were anyone else but a child! Jesus remembers somberly the affair of the Gadarene swine and the man possessed. He knows the strange effect on the multitudes sometimes brought about by miraculous cures. Deeply touched Jesus hesitates; he has never wanted to teach through the power of miracles — rather through the power of the word. But this is a child — one of his beloved children!

Jesus agrees to go to the child, and in company of Jairus sets out to the latter's home followed by a throng

of townspeople. But on nearing the home of Jairus, servants are seen running out weeping and screaming that the child is dead. Jairus turns ashen and has to be supported for he is incapable of walking unaided. Jesus lays a comforting hand on the stricken father's arm, and taking John and Peter with him, enters the house.

Members of the family, servants, friends, all are crowding the room bewailing the death of the girl, each one vying with the others in the loudness and vulgarity of their lamentations.

"Why make ye this ado?" Jesus asks them coldly. "She is not dead, but sleepeth."

At this, some of the kin become hysterical, and Jesus forthwith orders the room cleared of all but his disciples and the parents, for Jairus has now arrived.

To the latter Jesus says: "Fear not; only believe."

Then Jesus took the little girl's hand and said with infinite tenderness: "Maid, arise!"

The tremendous power of will, the matchless life force of Jesus is bared for an instant to their eyes, then it is gone, as the child opens her eyes and obediently arises.

The scales tipped. But instead of drawing them to him in closer bonds of faith and understanding, this very power which to them is incomprehensible, and that once before has been the victory that brought defeat, alienates them by the unreasoning power of fear. All that Jesus has said in rebuke, they remember. The forbidding thunder of his voice adds to their fright.

The word goes the rounds that Jesus has brought the dead back to life, and the icy hand of terror grips their minds. Now they draw away from Jesus; an icy wall of misunderstanding falls between the Master and the multi-

tudes, none the less real because it is invisible. Gleefully the Pharisees complete the work with barbed inuendoes, and accusations of sorcery.

It is too much. Jesus leaves their midst and goes to Samaria, to Tyre and Sidon. There in the lands of the Gentiles, Jesus leaves the echoes of his words and the fragrance of his deeds. More and more he withdraws from the people, and perfects his doctrine, imparting it with infinite patience to his disciples.

There are moments of bitterness and sadness for Jesus, knowing that the world withdraws further and further away from him. But in direct ratio as the world forces Jesus to withdraw within himself, so does his doctrine become more and more perfect.

At times, Jesus whose guilessness is proverbial, shows a prohetic insight into the mundane realm, for he tells his disciples: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and guileless as doves!"

The disciples know that there is no question now of a compromise with Judaism — it is a lesson they have to learn. True, Jesus often invoked the text against the false *Masores* of the Pharisees. But since his return to Galilee he has made it clear that his mission is concerned with the future — never with the past.

At this time Jesus confides to his chosen twelve, secrets that he would not share with the world. It is as if he has reserved for them a task which they are to carry out when he no longer would be with them.

"What I tell you in darkness," Jesus tells them, "that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops."

But preach when? Could the disciple preach effectively within hearing of the voice of the Master? And what could their voices mean in this stronghold of the heathen, where even the Master himself could make but little headway in their stony hearts.

They are not to be left in doubt.

Not for long are they to remain in that northermost corner of their land where everything is strange, and somehow they feel out of their depth. Unknowingly, they are like pilgrims who have travelled a weary road, and at last they are to see their journey's fulfillment.

XVI

Prophet, teacher — or merely deluded carpenter of Galilee! Is it a hope that he will conform to the narrow pattern of their lives and thus still the turbulent doubts in their minds? The family of Jesus does not know. Ever since his failure in the synagogue of his own city, his brothers and sisters have besought him to forsake his ministry and return to his humble tasks. Now, in desperation, they invite Jesus to depart to Judea.

Jesus having left the heathen lands is back in Galilee, and the message sent by his relatives is brought to him. "Depart hence and go into Judea, that thy disciples also may see the works thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world."

Could they have sent such a message? Had it not been perhaps phrased by other and wilier minds than the simple ones of his people? But what does it matter now?

Jesus has so often brooded on the stalemate of his last visit to Jerusalem. Inwardly he is aware that he will return. The hour is not yet — but very soon.

More than usual Jesus has been silent and withdrawn, as if debating inwardly some secret problem; or, perhaps,

listening for that hidden voice in the innermost recesses of his heart, that is the voice of his Father.

And suddenly, out of this long reverie, he gathers his disciples around him and asks them: "Whom say ye that I am?"

There is a curious reluctance in Jesus' question, as if he feared to have them know, and yet was aware that the knowledge was ultimately inevitable. But they do not know. In their simplicty, they echo the very legends and surmises that have sprung up about Jesus. Some say that Jesus is perhaps John the Baptist; others that he is Elijah; and still others, unaware of the irony in their words, considering the temper of Jesus lately, that he is Jeremiah! Soon, forgetting their initial reluctance to express their beliefs, which are not beliefs at all, for they are echoing the ideas of others, they begin to debate among themselves.

It is then that Peter, the impulsive and rugged Peter, speaks. His words have the quality of that very stone after which he is named. Rising with downcast eyes, he says in a voice hoarse with emotion: "Lord, thou are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

In the ensuing silence, the face of Jesus is illumined as if by an inner light. His arms sweep wide in benediction and with a radiant smile — the first in many days — Jesus says to him: "Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonas: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but by my Father which is in heaven."

Awed and uncomfortable, Peter does not know what to say. The other disciples cannot hide their disappointment; they have failed to understand whom they have followed and to whose words they have listened countless

times. Now that Peter has for the first time said it, they feel in their hearts that it is the only answer. In John's face there is the sweat of anguish, for he among all should have known. Or was it that he had been afraid to speak?

Thomas, he whose doubts are a constant source of turmoil in his inner self, sits motionless and slack-jawed.

None of them perceive the young woman listening in the background, lost in the decorously withdrawn group of women followers. She has been twisting her long, shining hair into a pair of heavy braids, but at the words, sounding faint with distance, her eyes fly wide. They are still listening to Jesus, who now asks them to move even closer, for he has something to impart.

And suddenly they are afraid, for the face of Jesus is deathly white, and the long, slender hand he puts forth trembles a little. The disclosure of Peter has unnerved them enough, what dreadful secret is the Master about to say to them now? They move closer as requested, but some even close their eyes, as if loth to hear what Jesus is about to disclose.

In measured tones, Jesus tells them of his decision to return to Jerusalem, and there fulfilling the ancient prophecy. For did not the proverb say that a prophet must not die without Jerusalem?

Fulfillment! But the ultimate meaning of the prophecy is death!

In an agony of despair, it is again the man of action, Peter, who grasps the arm of Jesus and protests: "Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be unto thee!"

It is the first time that Peter, or for that matter, any of the disciples has dared to contradict Jesus. It is only out of that endless well of anguish that overflows with

the loss of the beloved, that Peter has found the courage to try to stand in the way of the Master's consecration.

The rest stand aghast, for in the space of a few brief instants, the weight of these mighty revelations has overwhelmed them. And yet, these fleeting moments contain the distilled essence of eternity, if they but knew it.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!" Jesus exclaims in an altered voice. "Thou art an offence to me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men!"

In this peremptory and utterly final condemnation of Peter's effort to sway him from the 'will to death' towards the 'will to live,' Jesus makes known his inexorable determination to fulfill the ancient prophecy. Tall and resolute, his features stern and unyielding, Jesus is the very embodiment of will power.

No one knows what it must have cost Jesus to reach this sombre and heartbreaking decision; no one knows the turbulent torrent that rages in his heart. If he were to let himself go, he would open his arms to them, and welcome them as of old.

But convinced that it is the will of his Father, Jesus says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's the same shall save it. What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Beyond the bitterness of gall, is the knowledge that not only the Pharisees and Sadducees, the multitudes to whom he has ministered, and even the kin of the very ones he has cured and made whole, have failed to under-

stand him; but that his very disciples in the moment of ordeal, have lacked the vision and the strength to understand and thus accept his purpose.

Jesus feels with a pang of sorrow, the rift that has appeared between him and his beloved disciples. And the disciples for their part, visualizing their Master's death, feel in their horror that his avowed purpose is madness. Then too, for the moment they feel a keen resentment at the apostrophizing of Peter. They cannot comprehend that Jesus aimed his words *beyond* Peter.

More in sorrow than in anything else, Jesus sets his face away from them, and begins the long journey from which there was to be no returning.

Before him is Jerusalem, and the coming feast of Tabernacles.

The placid pool has overflowed; it has become a torrent that races clear and free with gathering momentum towards that eternal beginning and reservoir of all things.

Jesus begins the journey alone.

It is inevitable that the news of Jesus' Messiahship should become known. When such a startling message reaches the Tetrach Herod, the latter pales and exclaims: "It is John, who hath returned from the grave!" In his cold and battered heart, a rising fear sends a forgotten thrill along his jaded nerves.

Conflicting reports about what Jesus had said and not said, grow like flowers of evil on the fertile ground of rancour and resentment. All Galilee is agog with the subject of Jesus. But the Master is not there to defend

himself or confound them with their own lies. He is on his journey to Jerusalem.

Jesus is no sooner on his way, than emissaries of the Sanhedrim approach him under the guise of warning him of peril. They tell him that Herod has vowed to behead him and all prophets as he did John the Baptist. It seems to Jesus that their warning is rather late; it is such a transparent maneuver on their part, and so futile, which is far worse.

"Go and tell that fox," Jesus answers them, "behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall come to an end. Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following. For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."

It is an index to the depth of his conviction. Life itself pales into insignificance before the grandeur of the mission Jesus envisions in his mind and heart.

But Jesus is not destined to be alone in Judea; his every word and gesture is stamped in the hearts of his disciples; in his absence they grow restive, and life seems to have lost its savor. It is not long before they are hurrying in his footsteps, hoping to overtake him before he arrives at the Holy City.

Peter led them, and in his honest and humble heart he had forgotten that Jesus had apostrophized him as Satan — indeed, it is doubtful if he had ever remembered it, once it had been said. Peter only knew that he felt an anguish that never left him awake or asleep, an anguish that was an overwhelming need to gaze at the face of the Master, to hear the well-remembered voice, and know the peace and harmony of his nearness.

There were others, too, whom Jesus' absence troubled

beyond anything they had known in their lives; James whose fiery inspiration had often been the wonder of them all, became irritable and sullen, and his brother John seemed to retire behind an icy sheath of stubborn silence. For once the eternal doubts of Thomas, who doubted everything, were welcome when he expressed a doubt concerning Jesus' death. Judas . . . Judas knew the happiness of returning to Jerusalem. How much, how very much he had missed the splendor of the Holy City. The knowledge that every mile brought him nearer, lent wings to his weary feet.

When they finally came upon Jesus, they were but a few hours journey from Jerusalem. Jesus surrounded by his disciples bade them tarry and rest, and in the midst of their spontaneous and wholehearted joy at being with the Master, he softened, forgetting for a brief space what lay before him. And for a few enchanted hours, Jesus was again the divine herald of old who had preached the Gospel of Glad Tidings.

Incomparably, Jesus brought to them that intimate identification with all life, which specifically established a personal interest and regard for the plight of others — the heartfelt sympathy for the poor, the regard for the fallen and outcast; and for the first time in history, the feeling of moral indignation in behalf of the oppressed. It was not only an all-encompassing 'love of the people.' Its inner and vastly greater meaning was an 'extension of being!' Beyond the narrow and circumscribing limits of selfishness — of poverty of spirit.

All society was treated to a new conception of the dignity and pricelessness of human life, and its divine

origin attested in the Gospel of Jesus, not to speak of his being the living embodiment of it.

To the Sadducees, whose concept of ressurection extended only to survival in their progeny, such dignity, such an appraisal of humanity, was perforce preposterous and instinct with hidden dangers which they promptly magnified. They feigned to perceive in the doctrines of Jesus, the germ of a devastating social poison.

The ideas and philosophies of the great heathen world beyond, had passed through Israel with caravans and pilgrimages, but as yet had failed to germinate in that intolerant and casuistic soil. Greece already had its Hippocrates, and philosophers who were constantly preoccupied with the great 'universals' of science, and of human thought. Rome had built a gigantic military empire that feasted on the blood and substance of its vassal estates. But none, not one of them east or west, had as yet become conscious publicly of that thorny and submerged social problem which involved the ultimate and inalienable rights of humanity. Ridden with slaves, holding life a means of barter and exchange; giving *ownership* a power that rendered the crucifixion of a slave dependent on the whims and caprices of his or her master, the words of Jesus inevitably caused a profound astonishment and disquietude.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself!"

In one single short sentence Jesus had given the sum and substance of the social significance of his doctrine. Love thy neighbor as thyself? They asked aghast. The very spectre of prejudice and snobbery was galvanized by this sweeping answer. Imagine a Pharisee consorting with publicans and sinners! Imagine a member of the

august Sanhedrim tolerating the defiling touch of a harlot! Truly, such sayings to them, were not merely seditious and revolutionary, they were blasphemous!

They felt that this time Jesus would not espcape them. Never would they tolerate such teachings to continue to be given to the people; already the multitudes were showing signs of disrespect to the priesthood, and to object to the latter's prying into their lives! Hitherto, the fear of that little black book in which the priests wrote the names of recalcitrants, was enough to strike with icy fear the heart of a malcontent, but now, the brazen rabble even quoted to them — to them, mind you! the very words that this itinerant preacher of Nazareth was declaiming from the housetops.

It had been a long and weary pursuit of the quarry. But Jehovah was a just God. The quarry was about to enter the trap, they thought, and in anticipation of the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem, Hanan had summoned the Council.

The Sanhedrim with all its age-old ceremony was in session. Apprised of the imminent arrival of Jesus, they sifted the reports from the provinces.

With profound satisfaction, they were aware of the enmities and rancours which the last tour of Jesus through Galilee had left behind, aided by the subtle direction of the Pharisees. They learned of the displeasure of Herod the Tetrarch with unbounded joy, for this meant that they could count on his approval and, at least, his indirect aid.

Amid the welter of charges and counter-charges, amid the confusion of many voices suggesting means and methods of dealing with Jesus, they perceived one final factor

with startling clarity: Jesus had cut all ties behind him. He was like a man who fleeing a raging forest fire, is confronted with an holocaust in front. And they meant to be *that* holocaust. High time indeed that this rebel, leader of rebels be brought to judgment!

Besides, both the Sanhedrim as well as the Roman authorities were terrified at the thought of thousands upon thousands of irreconciliables and malcontents who had poured into the Holy City — a seething legion of fanatical minds ready to turn Jerusalem into chaos if given a resolute leader. Pilate had enough troubles as it was, and he feared that another uprising would put an end to his Governorship.

If Pilate was uneasy, Caiaphas, the High Priest who had long raged impotently at Jesus, was almost beside himself, torn between conflicting thoughts and emotions.

Only Hanan, his father-in-law, who secretly held the reins of Sacerdotal power, remained calm, and poised and sardonic. Broodingly he viewed the dogmatic tempest in the religious cauldron, with a contemptuous realism that embraced both sides of the question. He was not disturbed either by the Sadducees and their outraged clamor, or by the Pharisees and their venomous demands for revenge.

The steady flow of viands and delicacies that disappeared with astonishing precision down his capable maw, helped him to meditate in luxury on the subtle web he was slowly spinning to enmesh Jesus. A web that Hanan wove with the immemorial patience and skill of all wingless beings, to trap the glorious ones who soar.

It was the autumn equinox when the Feast of Tabernacles was observed. Already treasures had poured into

the Temple coffers from the avalanche of pilgrims who had flooded the city with color and smells, and a shifting, shouting, gesticulating humanity that strove to be heard above the din of cries and tumult.

Jerusalem had girded itself in bright colors and wore the smiles of a maiden being courted, for the great event.

But the carpenter of Galilee was to be ultimately the great event himself . . . and throughout the endless centuries to come.

XVII

"Master," Judas of Kerioth was saying. "Truly, it is the Temple of the Lord! For where can such magnificence be seen as here at Jerusalem!"

They were nearing the Temple, for Jesus after a brief rest, had chosen to return and teach in the great edifice — past scene of so much malice and ill-will against him.

But Jesus was insensible to its futile grandeur; the city oppressed him with its grim walls and heavy smells. As always, he longed for the pure air of his beloved hills, the illimitable expanse of blue skies and green, rolling fields. He sensed the very atmosphere of antagonism, of resistance to his doctrine, and felt that the sun itself seemed out of place in that abode of snares and difficulties, clamorous with the turbid stream of its people, who despised and mocked the pilgrims from Galilee.

"Seest thou these buildings," Jesus replied broodingly to Judas, "there shall not be left one stone upon another." Judas sensing the mood of Jesus, remained silent.

Once within the Temple, Jesus smiled for a moment upon an aged woman who had cast a tiny coin into the box of offerings; it was the widow's mite, its value insignificant, but judging from the poverty of her attire, the deeply etched lines of suffering and hunger in her face,

it might well have been all that she at the moment possessed.

"Behold," Jesus called attention to his disciples. "She has cast in more than they all; for all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God; but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

Perhaps it was this incident that set Jesus' mood, perhaps the outpouring of that inner spring of forgiveness and grace which characterized Jesus; at any rate, when he began to preach, there was enchantment in his voice, and all the old compassion of his understanding heart. His listeners were enthralled. Even the lesser priests of the Temple, were so convinced by his words, that in their enthusiasm they went to the higher priests with their tale of what they had heard, wondering if these words of Jesus were not rooted in truth.

With scant ceremony, the incensed priests rebuked them, for was it not a scandal that even the lesser minions of the Temple should be swayed by Jesus?

"Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees believed on him?" The indignant priests replied, "These people who know not the Law, are cursed!"

The priests rushed to the Sanhedrim, now in session, begging admittance with news of fearful importance. Their glib tongues soon reported the incident — even the Temple was being corrupted by the teachings of this rebel from Nazareth! What ought they do? Unctuously, they beseeched the Council for aid.

It was then that Nicodemus arose from his seat at the great table. It occurred to him that the very depths of hypocrisy had been reached by these priestlings, jealous of their prerogatives.

"Jesus corrupteth not. For with mine own ears have I heard him exalt the Lord our God, and give unto the people the precepts of the prophets."

With all the eloquence at his command, with all the erudition and understanding of a kind and noble nature, Nicodemus pleaded the cause of Jesus. But only a stony silence, the scowling brows of all those present met his plea.

At last Hanan could no longer contain himself, and in a voice abrim with acid, softly inquired: "Art thou also of Galilee, Nicodemus? Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

With sinking heart Nicodemus recognized defeat. Unanimously, the Council was an inpenetrable barrier he could not penetrate. He sensed their malignant hostility,and knowing them as intimately as he did, Nicodemus was aware that in their hearts they had already tried Jesus — perhaps even condemned him to death.

Only one thing was lacking — the propitious moment. As the weeks dissolved into the past, Jesus continued to teach in the Temple, in the face of obstinate disbelief, of hostility and even hate. It seemed as if another stalemate was to pair the previous one, when he had visited Jerusalem.

How much Jesus tasted of bitterness during those harrowing days and weeks passed in controversy and disputation, when the wily priests and Pharisees baited him with exegesis and the Law, cannot be known; it was a thorny and arid field on which he trod, therein the seeds of his doctrine shrivelled and died before they could germinate.

His only consolation were the hours he passed in the

evenings after an arduous day of preaching, when descending into the valley of Kedron, he would tarry for a while at an abode in Gethsemane, and thence went to spend the night on the Mount of Olives. Here on the Mount, covered with silver-green olive trees and fruitful figs, with its villages of Bethphage and Bethany, Jesus knew a measure of peace and found refuge from the constant machinations of the Pharisees. Only here could he meditate peacefully, and renew his strength for the daily ordeal at the Temple.

At the very summit of the Mount was Bethany, where Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary had their home. Often Jesus spent the hours of darkness with them, secure in the quiet glow of their devoted friendship. How far away Jerusalem seemed during these hours of sweet contentment, while Martha bustled happily about the simple home, ministering to Jesus and her brother, and Mary sat at his feet, pensive and absorbed, speculating on his words, oblivious of the prosaic absorptions of daily life. And yet, Jerusalem was but a scant hour and a half away.

Immersed in the amenities of this pastoral dwelling, Jesus forgot the endless bickerings of his enemies, and the sullen hostility of the priests. It was more than meat and drink to him.

Indeed, when Martha once complained of lack of help from Mary, Jesus gently chided her with a luminous smile: "Martha, Martha, thou art troubled," said he, "and carest about many things; now, one thing only is needful. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away."

Another member who often joined this small group,

was Simon, the leper, legal owner of the house, and considered as if part of the family. The five of them often gathered on the side facing Mount Moriah, with the roofs and terraces of the Temple far beneath them — the simplicity of their conversations contrasting with all that opulence below.

And when the sun rose at dawn, the Temple roofs seemed to be afire, gleaming with a thousand hues, amid the alabaster whiteness of the buildings.

Jesus would gaze at the superb sight, and inwardly sigh. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he had cried out in a moment of unusual bitterness, "thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together. . . ."

But by dint of infinite patience, and the lofty and compassionate burden of his doctrine, Jesus began to touch a great number of people.

Only here in Jerusalem few dared openly to avow Jesus' cause. They exposed themselves to being driven from the synagogue, and to excommunication, which under the Law carried with it confiscation and dispossession.

To this awful power could be traced the arrogance of the priesthood, whose bigoted ranks could visit upon the hapless victim the ultimate degradation of ceasing to be a Jew.

It was towards them and the innumerable *soferim,* that in exasperation Jesus directed his powerful eloquence.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees," he thundered one day, carried beyond himself at their evident efforts

to compromise him with the Roman authorities by linking him with the rebel movement of Judas the Gaulonite, "Hypocrites! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge, shut up the kingdom of heaven against men! for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, for ye devour widows' houses, and, for a pretense, make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves! Woe unto you, for ye are as graves which appear not; and the men that walk over them are not aware of them!"

And it was true, tragically true.

With appalling arrogance, the Pharisees excluded men from the kingdom of God by some sort of canonical prestidigitation rendering the entrance into the kingdom so complicated and abtruse, that the uneducated and humble could not find a way to enter.

Thus, between exalted moments when Jesus sought to carry his doctrines to the people, and moments of exasperation when he was forced to lash out at these perpetual cannonical hairsplitters, the life of Jesus in Jerusalem was a nightmare.

The only placid waking moments were the pitifully few he was able to spend at Bethany at the home of Lazarus.

The acrimony increased daily. At times it seemed as if the priests were ready to stone Jesus from the Temple itself, were it not sacrilege to do so in the sacred precincts of the Lord. Both sects—Sadducees and Pharisees—were in uproar, and the storm that Jesus had aroused at last

came to the ears of the Roman Governor, Pilate, at his fortress overlooking the Temple.

Tired beyond words, baited beyond endurance, in that very Temple that Jesus abhorred as a monument to iniquity. At last Jesus exclaimed: "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands!" Prophetic words of the storm that was soon to be unleashed on Israel. Words that were to be dinned in mockery at the hour of fulfillment.

"Madman!" screamed the Pharisees; "Blasphemer . . . Samaritan!"

"What curse hath fallen upon us?" The Pharisees implored raising their reddened eyes, "how long is this enemy to endure?" It seemed to them as if the life of Jesus were charmed, verily other men had been stoned for less. It had been so long since anyone had dared to question their way of life!

Even Jeremiah had not called them: "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. . ."

The very streets rang with imprecations and curses as heated arguments sprang between those for and against Jesus, until the Roman soldiery had to intervene at these gutterside vituperations and polemics. Pilate was said to walk his hall, white with anger.

"Has the world ever seen such turbulent people?" he asked of his innumerable Roman deities. "Why can't they enjoy their joyless religion in peace!"

Pilate wondered if the imposition of another tax might not divert their minds, but in fear of a riot gave up the idea.

Slowly the autumn melted into winter, and December brought the chill caress of icy desert winds, and still Jesus tarried at Jerusalem. Toward the end of the month, the city celebrated the Feast of Lights; in reality, a feast commemorating the purification of the Temple after Antiochus' sacrileges. Soon thereafter Jesus departed for Perea, and the banks of the Jordan where John the Baptist had baptized him. He did not tarry long in that country where John had been a voice in the wilderness, and the precursor of the greater one to come, for soon after his arrival a message came to Jesus from Martha and Mary that Lazarus, their brother, was very ill. The message couched in the most anxious terms, left no doubt but that there was danger of death. They also expressed the thought that the joy of seeing Jesus might restore him to health.

But Jesus was too late. Lazarus' sisters met him on the way, before he had entered Bethany; Jesus could tell from the sorrow mirrored in their faces that the worst had come to pass.

In silence, in the grip of a grief too deep for tears, Martha and Mary conducted Jesus to the cave where the body of Lazarus, swathed in wrappings, had been deposited.

Jesus experienced a profound emotion before the ultimate resting place of this beloved friend, in whose home he had found peace and refuge so many times.

He caused the heavy stone to be removed, and stretching forth his hands, exclaimed: "Lazarus come forth!"

To the joy of the sisters, the amazement of the disciples and the supersitions fear of the multitude that had

come to watch, Lazarus rose and came from the cave, still swathed in linen wrappings.

The cry of 'Resurrection!" swept the city from end to end, and allied to their hunger for the marvelous, the curiosity of the populace asked: "What say now the Pharisees?"

What have they said? In secret the Great Council of chief priests, headed by Caiaphas, and guided by Hanan, have just asked: "Can Judaism and Jesus exist together?"

It was Hanan who quietly supplied the cruel, the irrevocable answer: "It is expedient that one man should die for the people."

For fifty years the power of the High Priesthood had been in Hanan's family; for many years he himself had been High Priest, and had only relinquished the diadem to Caiaphas who was in fact, his son-in-law. No one dared question the authority of Hanan — besides, had he not uttered the only logical solution?

But still the hour was not yet. Immediately after calling forth Lazarus, Jesus had left for Ephron, near Bethel, but a day's journey from Jerusalem. It was an obscure village where with his disciples Jesus renewed his forces, and sought peace from the vulgar uproar in the Holy City. It was late in February now, and March was on the threshold. Already the order to arrest Jesus on sight had been given by the authorities, for Hanan had at last decided to act. His web was complete, it only remained now for the bait to attract the quarry.

The Feast of Passover was in the offing. Would that be the bait that Hanan had in mind? Surely, Hanan reasoned, Jesus could not fail to return to Jerusalem.

Certain now that Jesus could not escape, the cruel and crafty Sadducee bided his time. There was a certain man he had in mind who could be of immeasurable value to his plans. Thoughtfully, Hanan rubbed his soft, plump hands and smiled with cruel satisfaction.

XVIII

It was the sixth day before the Feast, Saturday the eighth of Nisan, when Jesus followed by his disciples entered Bethany. Of the entire group, Jesus was the only one whose countenance showed no trace of sadness. He had already spoken to his disciples concerning his approaching end, convinced that he was about to die.

They for their part, having already forgotten the earlier declaration of Jesus, had been troubled afresh, and their anxiety and fears were plainly visible.

Upon arriving at Bethany, Jesus went directly on to the home of his beloved friends, Lazarus and his sisters; they received him with great joy and prepared a reception for him. A veritable multitude was present at the dinner in Jesus' honor, many drawn by their curiosity, others earnest in their desire to see and hear Jesus. Mary in her ecstacy at the return of the Master, entered the room where Jesus was seated and breaking an ivory vial of spikenard on the Master's feet, anointed him.

It was a simple and festive scene, marred only by the cupidity of Judas, who audibly estimated what the value of the perfume would have brought for distribution to the poor.

As if confirming publicly what he had already told

his disciples in private, Jesus observed: "The poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always."

The assembled guests regarded him silently, wondering what Jesus' meaning might be but the disciples knew. It seemed to them as if they were already on the road to tragedy, and the cold hand of anguish tightened on their hearts.

But soon came the morrow.

It was Sunday when Jesus left the refuge in Bethany and directed his steps toward Jerusalem. At a bend of the road from the Mount of Olives, the entire city lay glittering in the sunshine at Jesus' feet. The kindness of distance hiding its imperfections, the sea of golden light in which it seemed to swim; the richness and grandeur of the Temple — all rendered it of surpassing loveliness.

Jesus wept.

At the base of the mount, upon entering that eastern portion of the city called Bethphage, all the Galileans who had come to the Feast were awaiting Jesus. The moment that they sighted his tall figure, a great cry of Hosanna rose from their throats, vibrating in the still air and echoing from the mountain. They had brought with them an ass behind which a young colt frisked unafraid. Their most treasured cloths had been spread upon the back of the mount, and on the very dust of the road itself that Jesus was to travel. An atmosphere of joy and love surrounded Jesus when he reached them.

They seated Jesus upon the animal, and the great multitude divided into a group that preceded him singing: "Hosanna to the Son of David."

Another followed behind, waving palms and crying: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

But they had not gone far before the Pharisees met them. They eyed the procession with cold disapproval, infuriated at what the followers of Jesus were singing.

"Master," one of the Pharisees said harshly, "rebuke thy disciples!" He was scandalized.

But Jesus said in a voice that all might hear: "If these should hold their peace, the very stones would immediately cry out." With a gesture, he bade them to continue, and went on into the city.

More and more pilgrims joined them, entering into the festal spirit, and joining their voices to those of the Galileans.

Wherever they passed, people asked: "Who is he?"

"It is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth!" came the answer.

And they remembered him; remembered the cleansing of the Temple, and the long disputations with the scribes. This then was the man who cast out devils, they said. And he who resurrected Lazarus, and put to shame the Sadducees! All the old legends as well as prejudices were revived, and in the midst of the confusion that Jerusalem had become for the Feast of Passover, the arrival of Jesus in triumph, preceded and followed by an immense multitude hailing him as 'Son of David,' was the chief event. Jesus had even been hailed as 'Messiah' and 'King' on the very streets of Jerusalem!

The echoes of the processional as Jesus went on to the Temple were never to dwindle into silence.

For three days, following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple, where he enthralled his audience under the covered aisles of the drafty portico of Solomon.

There were no doubts, no fleeting uncertainties or annoyances now in the increasing rapture of his words, as if Jesus were intent on pouring out all the treasures of his inner self. All the joyous serenity that had long characterized Jesus was magnified, as if he were nearing that goal which for almost three years he had travelled a weary land.

In the evenings, Jesus would return to Bethany and spend the night among his disciples and friends, leaving early at dawn to return to the city.

And on Wednesday the twelfth, a new Council was held at the home of the High Priest. It was but a perfunctory gesture, for the order for the arrest of Jesus had already been given; only that the great Sanhedrim wished to avoid riots, and fearing the large number of followers of Jesus, it was thought best to arrest him without inciting an outbreak.

The next day was Thursday, and it was decided to trap Jesus away from the Temple.

And Hanan who had already singled out one of Jesus' disciples for the task of betraying where the Master would be at night, outlined the procedure to them. It was so simple! Especially since Jesus was willing to drink the cup of bitterness to its very dregs.

"Jesus must be arrested Thursday!" Hanan exclaimed. He was thinking that on Friday the festival of the Passover began, and it was unseemly to carry out the plan on that sacred day.

From where he lay, amid the heavy cushions of oriental silk, himself robed in silks of priceless texture, Hanan's laughter was like the spectral echo of the death rattle in men's throats; it was the clacking of dry bones.

It sent a chill of nameless dread down the spines of the other Council members present. Their high-pitched voices dwindled and died — restlessly they sought to leave the chamber, glad to entrust the arranging of this delicate matter to Hanan's soft white hands.

The Council was over. Hanan's sons helped the ex-High Priest to his feet, for his straining muscles could no longer raise that obese and globular body; Hanan tottered for a second, then righted himself with a subdued groan, for he was very old; and yet the penetrating gaze of his bright eyes was filled with the lust for life. Only one matter remained unsettled now — how much to pay the informer who would guide the authorities to Jesus.

"The price shall it be? . . ." Hanan inquired coldly, sweeping the assembled priests with a rapid glance. They looked at one another, for the moment abashed despite their rancour and their malice. None cared to fix the price, for it seemed to them like the compounding of a felony, and in the back of their minds, the thought of the approaching Passover lent an unholy tinge to these proceedings, by contrast.

"Well?" It was Hanan, peremptorily . . . not to be denied. What had happened to these milksops? Had they lost their courage, perchance?

Hanan gave them a few more instants to consider, then shrugged his monumental shoulders and exclaimed: "Thirty pieces of silver!"

And leaning on the arms of his sons, he left the chamber and went into his study, without so much as a glance at the priests. In his mind, the arrangements were complete; he had no time to debate the matter of

scruples. Later he would see to it that there would be no question as to Jesus' guilt. From vast experience he knew the genius for controversy with which both Pharisees and Sadducees were endowed, and Hanan meant to leave no loophole for criticism or even debate. He was very tired.

He wondered by what unkind fate it was left to him to cope with this Galilean madman! The thought of the weakness and laziness of the priests infuriated him. Even Caiaphas with his talent for intrigue had his moments of weakness. But for him, Hanan, this leader of the rabble would certainly go free.

"Ha!" Hanan exclaimed immersed in thought, thereby startling his dutiful sons. "He hath called us vipers, and vipers' brood!" And then he laughed, mordantly, cynically, for Hanan was thinking how aptly the epithet described the Pharisees.

"Father!" One of Hanan's sons inquired alarmed, tentatively, wondering what transpired in that ancient mind.

But Hanan waved his hand at them. "Leave me," he said peremptorily, and tottered alone into his study, swaying on his absurdly small feet.

Was it for this that he had forsaken Judea? To be rebuked by the Master and held up to ridicule? Judas asked himself bitterly. What if he had questioned the extravagance of pouring precious spikenard on Jesus' feet?

"Yea," murmured Judas, "the poor ye have always with you . . ." and he recalled their poverty, the endless

weeks of sleeping along fields and hedgerows; the hours of hunger and thirst, when the not always kind populace had closed their doors to them.

Was it for this that he had forsaken his mother, and his home, and given up a promising career? Truly, he had been promised the kingdom of God, but the 'kingdom' had receded into the distance day by day, until now it remained only as a nebulous outline which Judas could not see quite clearly. Besides, had not the Master told them he would leave them? Was all this talk of death and atonement else but the dream of the deluded? Perhaps his relatives were right when they decried his loyalty, and mocked him with charges of following a visionary who had failed to seize the many opportunities as they came, and was content to be led to the slaughter like a Paschal lamb!

"And he could have been a king!" Judas wailed aloud in his exasperation, unaware of doing so. "He could have been a king!" Even yet there was a chance . . . the thought was like a lance of fire in Judas' mind. But no, he reflected, Jesus would never take up the sword. Judas clenched his fists impotently.

"Well, then, so be it; he would force his hand!" Judas did not want to think. He strove to still the voices that swirled and danced in his brain, voices that clamored and laughed and wept and brought forth a thousand recollections.

Meanwhile, Judas' steps were leading him inexorably, one by one, towards the house of Hanan, where a certain priest he had known of old, who had been part of the colorful life of Judea, had promised to meet him.

Hanan's house! Judas felt a burning shame, and also

a tinge of fear, why he did not know. Perhaps it was at the prospect that Hanan himself might be present. Could it be a trap to ensnare him? Judas brushed the thought away — what could it profit them?

It was Jesus they wanted. Had not Jesus allowed the multitudes to proclaim him as Messiah-King? Had not the thousands upon thousands joined their triumphal entry into Jerusalem, swelling their ranks by legion with a following no king or potentate had ever had? Well, let Jesus show his power now . . . let him call upon his Father to send him a legion of angels with flaming swords. Prophet or charlatan, madman or Son of God, the truth would have its day!

Judas found himself before the hermetically closed dwelling of the great ex-High Priest. A cold chill of dread made him close his eyes. For an instant he wavered, then he went up the steps. . . .

As if they had been awaiting him, the door opened briefly, then closed behind him. A cold and dismal wind swept by with a mournful wail.

XIX

It was Thursday; thousands of pilgrims waited patiently in long lines that extended from the Temple, down the terraces to the street. All carried their paschal lambs for the blessing. The clamor of the conversations mingled with the bleating of the lambs, the cries of the vendors urging last minute sales, and the intoned ritual of the priests. A heavy pall of incense, perfumes and roasting fat, hung over the Holy City.

Everywhere, a restless, excited multitude ebbed and flowed like a mighty tidal wave. Camels kneeled in the dust, laden with cloths and spices and merchandise; children ran screaming among the throngs seeking their parents from whom they had become temporarily separated, and over all the ceaseless singing of the lesser priests who performed the ritual slaughter, was like an endless counterpoint to the cacophony of sound.

The next day, Friday was the commencement of the Passover. It was Hanan's hope that the itinerant preacher of Nazareth could be quietly seized in some unfrequented retreat where he and his disciples habitually spent the nocturnal hours. The authorities knew all about Bethany. But to arrest the prophet in the midst of his followers

and friends was to invite disaster. For all Jerusalem needed was a spark in order to burst into flame.

Hanan had no intention of allowing Jesus or his disciples an opportunity to invoke aid from their followers, or from the multitudes that had witnessed the triumphal entry into the Holy City, and even joined the singing, palm-waving throngs enroute to the Temple.

To this end Judas had been bribed.

But when Jesus finally entered Jerusalem on Thursday, the thirteenth of Nizan, it was so late that the authorities had begun to despair of being able to spring their trap. But Jesus had had every intention of eating the Paschal lamb in Jerusalem — perhaps for the last time. It may have been his profound premonition of death that led him to order his disciples to make arrangements for the feast on that fateful Thursday, instead of awaiting the morrow according to tradition.

Jesus went directly to the establishment where a private room had been reserved for him and his chosen group. When Jesus entered the rooms, the lamps were trimmed and lighted; the usual cushions had been laid on the floor in a semi-circle, covered with fresh cloths, and the low table set in the center.

Jesus sat with Peter and John on either side of him, and the rest of the disciples disposed about him in a semi-circle. It was the traditional supper of fragrant herbs and fruit stew, with the Paschal lamb brought in at the end as a last course.

The Master had not left any doubts in the minds of his disciples, but that the hour had come, and that henceforth he would no longer be in their midst. And still, upon that long pale face with the luminous eyes, the

broad forehead and strong curved lips, no sign of the knowledge Jesus carried in his heart, was visible. The disciples had never been so near to Jesus; they had never seen him so radiant. They felt the almost tangible outflow of love that Jesus directed towards them. For a moment they wondered if all their fears, all the anguish they had experienced when the Master had revealed to them his ultimate atonement, were not an evil nightmare. For seeing Jesus in the midst a radiant figure, feeling the exaltation of his unique magnetism, the very idea of his death seemed a vague and monstrous dream.

But all the serenity Jesus had imparted his disciples was shattered when the wine was brought in and mixed with water by the Master.

For after blessing the first cup, the Master said gently: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I shall drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

It brought them back with a cold, sickening feeling; it was a reiteration of an inescapable reality that all of them must face, and that must not be lost even in the midst of their cherished fellowship and love as they observed the Passover.

Not until the second cup had been quaffed; not until the lamb had been brought in and eaten; not until the singing of psalms had restored a measure of buoyancy and gladness to their group, did Jesus unburden himself of that which lay like a dead weight in his heart. It was not

Note: John - XIII, 1, 2, 29; XVIII, 28, XIX. 14, 31. The Talmud expressly states that *"Jesus died on the eve of the Passover."* (Friday). John whose authority on the Last Supper and the death of Jesus is pre-eminently acceptable, states that Jesus died *'on the same day the paschal lamb was eaten.'* (Friday).

death. It was not the agony that Jesus already knew he must endure, ere he would be free to return to that divine source whence his serene and buoyant soul had come to tarry for a brief instant in the worldly anthill.

The words came, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

It was said without reproach . . . even without passion. It was said in a voice burdened with a love so great that it surpassed beyond all reckoning the poor human passion of the heart.

Aghast, bewildered, swept by a flame of anguish and of shame, the disciples gazed at one another unable to speak. Even James, whose flaming nature was governed by impulses, made no sound.

"But with a smile that caricatured innocent unbelief, Judas asked Jesus, "Master, is it I?"

For a few moments, each more fraught with meaning than whole annals in the chronicles of mankind, Jesus gazed at Judas of Kerioth. He gazed as the mountains might look at the plains; as the stars wheeling in their orbits might gaze at a passing meteor. Something inscrutable, beyond all understanding, seemed to look for an instant out of the dark blue eyes of Jesus, until now abrim with kindness — then it was gone.

Jesus had closed his eyes, and he was saying, "It is one of the twelve. The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It were better for that man if he had never been born!"

That was all—a prophecy and a warning. A prophecy that regardless of betrayal, the end would be accomplished; a warning out of the infinite compassion of his

heart that might deter the one who, having lost faith in him, had agreed to the betrayal.

And then Jesus gave them the last mystery.

He took up a small loaf of unleavened bread and breaking it, distributed the fragments saying: "Eat: for this is my body."

Then Jesus lifted up the last cup, brimming with red wine from which the lamplight struck shimmering reflections, and said pensively, almost whispering to himself: "This is my blood of the new Testament which is shed for many."

He sighed softly and gazed into their faces as if he would remember them forever as they were at that moment, much as a father would gaze upon his assembled children prior to embarking on a long journey.

At that moment, he stood slender and tall like a sheathed sword, and his eyes had the look of one who saw a vision that the rest failed to see.

Then Jesus went out into the night, without another word, and all his disciples but one followed in the wake of his silence — all but one — Judas of Kerioth.

The Garden of Gethsemane was filled with the soft murmurs of the breeze in the trees, the odor of fertile earth in the Spring, and the hushed, tiny noises of the small creatures of the night as they went about their nocturnal errands. Above it towered the dark mass of the Mount of Olives. All was darkness, the chill, eerie darkness of the hours past midnight.

Jesus and his disciples had come through the valley of Kedron. He now led them to a glade amid the trees, bidding them rest. Jesus himself wandered off a little,

and presently began to pray with his face buried in his hands.

At first the disciples made an effort to remain wide awake, for the words of Jesus at the Supper had been unmistakeable. All of them felt an oppressive premonition of tragedy and disaster, and although they had not fully comprehended all that the Master had said, on one point there had been no misunderstanding — the Master's death.

But slowly, the soporific effects of the hot food, and the wine began to overpower their bodies and their minds. Presently all were asleep, but John and James. Even Peter who had been most agonized of all, had fallen into deep slumber at the base of a tree.

Jesus walked restlessly to and fro in the grove. As he prayed in the lonely darkness of Gethsemane, John and James watched, half in awe, in the hope that Jesus might be swerved from his decision.

Once passing near James and John, Jesus said to them: "My soul is sorrowful unto death. Tarry ye here and watch."

Then Jesus continued to pace among the trees in a strange and profound agitation, as if his very being cried out to that Father to whom he prayed.

John saw Jesus halt for an instant and then kneel on the grass-carpeted earth, his head bowed, his shoulders heaving.

And the Master's voice was raised in altered tones: "Father, all things are possible unto thee! Take thou away this bitter cup from me . . . take thou away this bitter cup!"

All the unspoken anguish of the world, was in that

voice; all the bitter sorrow since time began, was in those words.

After that paroxysm, the mantle of calm returned to the shoulders of the Master; it was the last bitter protest of the body and the mind, aware of the coming destruction. But the spirit had conquered, and although his face was inexpressively pale and ravaged by sorrow, the serenity that had always been so integral a part of Jesus, was stamped anew on the ascetic features of the Master.

Calmly, Jesus walked through the grove of trees back to his disciples, as if once more he would hear their voices, gaze upon their beloved faces even in the dim illumination of the stars. John and James rose wordlessly at his approach, and followed him back to where the rest slept. Jesus paused by the side of Peter — Peter who had been always the tower of strength, the very epitome of honesty and utter devotion to Jesus; the Master gazed long at the young, rugged face of Peter, relaxed in sleep. Then he awoke Peter gently, saying: "Sleepest thou? Could'st thou not watch one hour, Simon?"

In utter confusion Peter arose, unable to find words with which to reply. He stood silent and abashed, first looking at the rest of the sleeping disciples, then at Jesus, whose face seemed softened by a brooding sadness, in the dim illumination.

Before Peter could formulate an answer, Jesus making a sweeping gesture that encompassed John and James, and Peter, and the sleeping forms of the disciples, exclaimed: "All of ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.' "

Jesus paused briefly, then looking intently at Peter he

said: "Verily I say unto you, that this night, before the cock crows thou shalt deny me thrice!"

"Though I should die with thee," Peter answers deeply hurt, "yet I will not deny thee, Master."

At the sound of their voices, the other disciples began to awaken, and hearing the words of Jesus, and Peter's reply, they, too, protested their loyalty. Jesus' only answer was a faint melancholy smile before he turned away.

But before he had walked a few paces, the flash of lanterns, the metallic clang of weapons, and the murmur of voices startled all of them into immobility.

It was the Temple guard, led by a detachment of Roman soldiers; these could be told even at a distance by their disciplined marching, their expressionless faces and naked swords. At their head was their Captain, whose sharp eyes scrutinized the group of disciples as if seeking some one in particular.

As they entered the clearing in the garden, the brooding stillness was shattered by a cry of gladness: "Master, Master!"

It was Judas.

Effusively he kissed Jesus on the cheek and clung to him as if in ecstasy at having found the Master again.

The Captain nodded as though the brotherly caress had been a prearranged signal. He was not prepared for the stately dignity of Jesus, as the latter gazed into Judas' eyes and said simply: "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

Friend? Could it be possible? Could this being, whose measured words spoken in sonorous tones, were calm and poised and unhurried, be the malefactor they sought? In their astonishment, the Temple guards grounded their

weapons and looked at one another uncertainly. Inwardly they sensed a betrayal, something unclean, the baseness of which seemed heightened by the nearness of the Passover.

But in the mind of Peter there were no doubts; instantly he sensed that they had come for Jesus, that Judas had led them to their secret spot for the arrest, and drawing a sword he had carried concealed, he smote the ear of the nearest member of the arresting party. Instantly the newcomers lunged forward, for Peter's act of aggression had broken the spell, but they did not lunge at Peter — it was Jesus they wanted.

Too late had the Master tried to stave off Peter's impulsive act. Suddenly he was seized, as his disciples were scattered by the Roman soldiery and the Temple guards; swords flashed in the scarlet illumination of the lanterns and torches, and the faces of his captors were thrown into grotesque relief by the dancing flames.

"Put up again thy sword into its place," counselled Jesus, "for all they that take the sword, shall perish by the sword!"

Helpless against the numbers and weapons of his attackers, Jesus by his utter detachment of manner rose above them. He scarcely seemed to be the quarry, as he turned his face towards the milling captors and addressed them vibrantly, but without passion:

"Think ye that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall give me more than twelve legions of Angels?" he paused. "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled?" Jesus asked. "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves to take me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on me!"

But to the Roman Captain these words meant little; he had a duty — a distasteful duty to perform, and he intended to carry it out as quietly and efficiently as possible. He had little love or liking for these Jewish people who seemed to have a remarkable genius for being constantly in uproar. If they wanted one of their prophets arrested, and the High Priest and Sanhedrim had given the order, he was content to carry it out and let them 'season their unsavory stew.'

Gesturing to his centurions to complete the arrest, he gave the order to march, and presently they left the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus a prisoner in their midst.

Only John and Peter were witnesses as their Master was led away; the rest of the disciples fled in the underbrush of the garden, leaving behind them the crackling echo of their precipitate flight. Birds and furtive creatures of the night were startled into flight themselves at their passing, and it was many minutes until the eerie, brooding silence of the garden returned under the cold rays of the stars.

As they marched back to Jerusalem, the Temple guards disputed among themselves the charges against Jesus; their ribald laughter at the Master echoed obscenely down the dark and deserted countryside.

Only the Captain was silent. He had fared to distant lands, had fought the Gauls and the tribes of Spain, and in all these places had faced oblivion without fear or qualms. But he had never seen a man so master of himself as Jesus. He wondered why he had felt a faint shame when he had given the final order of arrest. Why? Was it because this unresisting man had looked at him with a serenity that he himself had never known? Was it because

he had stood before them with all the unconscious dignity of a king?

Unused to speculations, the Captain tried to brush away the swarm of thoughts that swirled through his brain, and as if to comfort himself he swore briefly, feelingly. It seemed to him that even the Greeks whose marble Gods had been brought to Rome, would have found in this man Jesus, the ultimate, the ideal model, to preserve in the marbles of Corinth, the very essence of peace.

Back through the valley of Kedron, back through the silent streets of the Holy City, wrapped in the slumber that the excitement of the many preparations for the Passover made fitful, the detachment of soldiers and Temple guards went, until at last they arrived before the House of Hanan. Behind them, John and Peter had followed at a distance, anguished, despairing, torn by the tempest of emotions that the arrest of Jesus had unleashed in their breasts.

In the chaos that was their minds, they could not find an answer to their problem. They only knew that all the quiet love they had felt for the Master, was a soaring flame within them that would not be denied. Neither John nor Peter had a clear plan of action. They did not know what they would do when they arrived at the, to them, unknown destination of Jesus; they only knew that some profound impulse impelled them not to lose sight of the Master.

Quickly, Jesus was brought into Hanan's house; they must have been waiting for him, for his captors took him immediately into the inner chambers where the ex-High Priest spent nearly all of his time reclining on cushions, from where he directed his manifold sacerdotal activities.

John and Peter followed them inside, and paused in the courtyard which formed a sort of antechamber; a brazier of glowing coals had been lit by the porter, against the penetrating chill of the night, and several servants were warming themselves before it.

John and Peter approached the sleepy and irritable group of servants, and spread their numbed hands to warm them at the fire.

"Art thou not one of Jesus' disciples?" One of the servants sneered catching sight of Peter, "Have I not seen thee at Gethsemane?"

The man was a relative of Malchus, and one of Hanan's servants, who felt he recognized Peter.

"It was not I." Peter replied woodenly, with downcast eyes.

But his Galilean accent betrayed him, for more than ever the servant was certain that Peter was the man he had seen with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was insistent that Peter was one of the followers of Jesus, and pressed his inquiry to the point where Peter in anger began to curse, and ended by denying Jesus thrice. It was then that in the distance, the clarion call to morning of a cock, came muffled and faraway.

Remembering, Peter closed his eyes as the flooding memory of the Master's prophecy filled his mind. He gave one single, strangled sob as he fled out into the street weeping bitterly.

Behind him, Peter left the coarse peals of the servants' laughter, and the unknown fate of Jesus, who had been taken before Hanan for questioning. The first gray

luminescence of the false dawn had begun to dispel the darkness; the stars had begun to pale.

All but the morning star that shone forth with a strange hard glitter in all its glory.

XX

In the lofty chamber, austere by virtue of its sombre colors, but luxurious in its brocaded silks and broidered hangings, Hanan reclines ensconced on a monumental pile of cushions that sags under the ex-High Priest's immense weight. A musty odor of great age, the accumulated perfume of generations clings to the stiff portiers, the hangings on the walls, even to the cushions and cloths scattered about the room; only the faint fragrance of spikenard that Hanan uses in the anointing oil, offsets the depressing smell.

Many of the higher priests are present, and among them several of the Pharisees whose authority gives them an entrance to Hanan's sanctum. There is no light save the two candles that have been placed, one on either side of Jesus — for everything must be done according to the law, lest later criticisms and bickerings arise.

Jesus stands straight and silent, gazing ahead of him, as if lost in some inner meditation which makes him oblivious of his surroundings, as well as of those present. His robe is torn by the brambles, stained and dishevelled; the night wind has tousled his hair until it swirles about his shoulders in disarray. But the impassive expression on his face, lends him a strange, incongruous dignity.

Hanan is quick to sense Jesus' lack of fear. Inwardly he admires the poise and aplomb of the man, but in the atrophied organ that is Hanan's heart, there is no sympathy, no trace of pity for the victim he has ensnared in his web.

The Council is not present in full, perhaps two dozen members are present, but no matter — Hanan shrugs his obese shoulders — it is enough. Charges and counter charges fly; everything that Jesus has done and said since he drove the money-changers out of the Temple on his previous visit to Jerusalem, is hurled at him.

And still, the Master remains silent, absorbed — indifferent almost, as if this tawdry and futile drama is being enacted by marionettes. All throughout, Hanan's beady eyes have been regarding Jesus from amid their folds of flesh.

The anger that he feels at Jesus' composure finally boils over, and he inquires silkily: "What is thy doctrine?"

At the sound of Hanan's voice, all other sounds cease, such is the awful power of the ex-High Priest.

Jesus withdraws his gaze from that point in the distance where it had been fixed, and he answers quietly: "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogues and in the Temple, and I have hidden nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask those who heard me, what I said unto them. Behold, they know what I said."

Convulsively, Hanan grasps a handful of silken cushion. None in their wildest moments have ever dared answer him with such a complete disregard of his priestly power. But before he can snarl his reply to this affront, an officious lesser official of the Temple seizes the occasion

to ingratiate himself with Hanan, and strikes Jesus a blow.

"Answerest thou so?" he thunders pompously.

"If I have spoken evil, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Jesus answers calmly, disdainfully almost.

Hanan smiles grimly. "We will see!" He waves his hand, and suborned witnesses who have all the while been ready to testify, come forward unctously, bowing before the ex-High Priest.

They shout as if rehearsed beforehand: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another that is made without hands'."

Among all the charges made against Jesus, perhaps this is the gravest of them all, for it involves blasphemy.

Again Jesus remains silent. No hint of his thoughts, or for that matter his feelings, is visible upon his serene countenance.

"Answerest thou nothing?" Human beside himself almost shrieks, leaning forward until his bloated stomach is creased into many folds.

There has been no denial to the accusation. But Hanan is far from satisfied. He intends to present his case to Pilate, the Roman Governor, in such a way, as to force the issue and make the penalty of death inevitable — irrevocable. For a few instants he is lost in thought, searching the involved recesses of his mind for a question that will result in a definite avowal — and in the very heart of the greatest of Jewish aspirations, in the very core of all the Jewish hopes, Hanan finds it.

He crosses his hands inside the sleeves of his silken

robe, an evil gleam of triumph lights the old and rheumy eyes.

When he speaks, his voice is soft, insinuating as a caress: "Tell us: Art thou the Messiah?"

All those present hold their breath, the silence in the warm and musty chamber is intense.

It seems to them as if an eternity has passed before Jesus answers. "If I tell ye, ye will not believe. But if I should ask you, ye will not answer me — nor let me go!"

By his composure, by his inherent dignity and the admirable logic of his words, Jesus remains superior to his accusers, and to the farcical trial arranged by his enemies.

It is more than Hanan can bear.

At last he loses all his calm. The veiled hatred he has held in check, flames forth as he totters to his feet and shrieks, pointing at Jesus with a trembling hand: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God!"

The moment for the ultimate, the supreme avowal has come at last, forced into the open by the feeble venom of an ancient priest, who more than a question seems to have made a statement.

And Jesus, from the pinnacle of that renunciation he had already made in the Garden of Gethsemane, replies simply: "Thou hast said it!"

Before his enemies can speak, before pandemonium can cut loose in that austere chamber where he has been brought, already tried and convicted in his enemies' heart, Jesus continues: "Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven!"

The meaning of the magnificent words is Daniel's but

Jesus has given them an interpretation of his own, as if to leave no doubt in their minds as to his Messiahship, as if to leave no weapon out of their hands with which to wound him. Above the babel of voices and outraged exclamations, the harsh voice of Hanan rises in a wail as he raises his arms on high and again shrieks: "He hath blasphemed! What need further have we of witnesses? Behold, ye have heard his blasphemy! What sayeth ye?" Hanan's face is mottled and his loose lips wet with saliva as he turns on the priests and Pharisees.

"Guilty! He is guilty unto death!" They thunder, all poise and dignity forgotten in the general condemnation of Jesus.

It is over. Incredibly, the trial is over! They had thought it would have taken hours of grilling and the testimony of the witnesses that Hanan had prepared, to break down the resistance of this prophet of Galilee. But his own words have condemned Jesus even beyond the greatest expectations of his enemies. Jerusalem had spilled the blood of many prophets, but none such as this, who in his own words had claimed the great, the ultimate of their hopes: Messiahship!

All that is needed is to send Jesus to Caiaphas, for the perfunctory routine of having the High Priest pass the sentence. They would go themselves for the pleasure of hearing it, and looking into the condemned man's face.

The few remaining hours before dawn, when Jesus is to be taken before Caiaphas for sentencing, he is kept a prisoner in the hands of slaves and servants, who, out of the bitterness of their servitude, perhaps from the depths of their debased stations, find a ghoulish delight in sparing Jesus no indignity. They have found to be sure

that he can not defend himself, unaware that Jesus would not have done so, even if he could. They dance around him in a bachanal of mockery and invective.

When the Captain of the guards on his way to make the rounds comes upon them, he finds Jesus stripped of all but his robe; a crown of thorns has been pressed around his head, and they have sat him against a pillar after placing a reed in his hand.

On seeing the Roman Guard, one of the servants shouts: "Behold, Captain, the King of the Jews!" A torrent of laughter accompanies the words.

But the stern face of the Roman, the utter disgust at their cowardly sport, mirrored in his eyes, sobers them a little. The Captain spits with all the contempt possible to a Roman Soldier. He has met and vanquished enemies in battle, honorably. But this — this to him is beyond the dignity of man.

Indignant, the Captain of the Guards remains silent, but in that steely glance he gives the revellers, there is more meaning than words could possibly convey. For their part, the servants become quiet; they shift their glances uncertainly at one another — it is not until the Roman has left that they return to their infamous pastime of baiting Jesus.

One by one the members of the august Council filed into the room, voicing the traditional salutations out of compressed lips. Not all the Council was present, and there was no need — truly, but for the stiff formalism which effectively ruled their sacerdotal lives, even the technicality of having Caiaphas pronounce the sentence

upon Jesus could have been dispensed. Hanan, the ex-High Priest had already unequivocally pronounced it in his mind and theirs. It would have been incredible that Caiaphas, his son-in-law, could have dared to countermand it.

Bound with his hands behind him, Jesus was brought in, and for the second time the inquisitorial process was repeated. Swifter this time, for Jesus by his silence indicated he would have no part in this hypocritical mummery, and for their part, they had no need of Jesus' answers. But it was written, the Law enjoined it, thus traditions were safeguarded.

After a while Caiaphas rose; his narrow, hawk-like face was pale, and the brilliant eyes had a strange, reluctant look. As if desiring to finish with the unpleasant duty, he condemned Jesus to death, slurring over the words of the prescribed sentence in his haste.

Only one thing was needed now, the consent of the Governor. It would be necessary to visit Pilate in his Fortress Antonia overlooking Jerusalem. He would not dare refuse — not when he heard the charges that Hanan with diabolical cleverness had designed, so that they partook of blasphemy, and if anything else were needed to justify the sentence in the pagan Roman mind — of political rebellion.

It was over.

Caiaphas sighed with genuine relief, and consoled himself with the after-thought, that the sentence had really been passed by Hanan — he, Caiaphas, had merely pronounced it as High Priest. Then with the slightest of smiles it occurred to him, that neither he, Hanan, nor for that matter, the Sanhedrim, had any power to execute

the sentence; it would devolve upon Pilate to carry it out. The smile had been caused by the remembrance of Pilate's antipathy. How the stiff-necked Roman would hate to accede to their wishes!

After the sentence had been pronounced by Caiaphas, Jesus was again held a prisoner until time to go before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. The members of the Sanhedrin dispersed, each one going to his respective home, to don the festal robes they traditionally wore when visiting the representative of Rome.

The sun had risen by the time the council members left; the colorful and varied life of Jerusalem had awakened to the new day — the day in which the Paschal Lamb was to be eaten, for it was the Friday fourteenth of Nizan.

The clamorous and heterogenous life of Jerusalem increased as the sun rose higher in the heavens, slowly climbing to its zenith, as if reluctant to bring about the hour when Jesus was to be brought before the Roman Governor, and the charges against the carpenter of Galilee proclaimed in public.

Pilate had already been apprised that the chief priests and elders were about to visit him, bringing with them a prisoner to the tribunal in the judgment-hall.

By the time priests and elders of the Sandehrim had arrived at the judgment-hall, an immense crowd had collected in the streets, and followed in the wake of what to them looked almost like a processional; for the priests had donned their ceremonial robes, dressing with the exquisite care for detail and tradition that the occasion demanded.

Their expressionless faces were set, their hands folded in the prescribed manner — they exuded an air of fanaticism and relentless purpose.

Pontious Pilate had seen them coming from afar, with the bound prisoner — Jesus — in their midst. With a practiced eye he calculated the numbers comprising the huge crowd that had formed a delighted tail to the procession, much as the tail of a comet. He saw calmly the possibilities of a riot in that restless multitude, and being already aware of the nature of the visit, Pilate swore in irritation at having to mix in these senseless religious quarrels of the Jews.

Caiaphas and Pilate met in the structure that had been erected for use as a courthouse, thereby solving the problem of having to enter the judgment-hall and being defiled thereby.

Caiaphas eyed Pilate with distaste, silently, coldly, much as a sovereign would eye a barbarian conqueror with whom he is forced to transact business.

Pilate for his part was still fuming at having to be mixed in affairs of this sort. No amenities were wasted. Pilate regarded the bound Jesus, and inquired into the nature of the charges, it was evident by his gruff and uncivil manner, that he was profoundly annoyed.

"What is thy accusation?" Pilate asked.

"He turneth our people against us!" One priest shouted.

"He hath basphemed," screamed another; "He hath refused to give tribute unto Caesar. . . . "

A veritable babel of accusations and charges flew from the mouths of the priests. But Caiaphas, their legal

spokesman, turned quietly and regarded them with a cold, impassive, look, silencing their vehement voices.

Then Caiaphas turned to Pilate. And in keeping with the orders of his father-in-law, Hanan, said quietly, emphatically: "He calls himself the Christ, the King of the Jews!"

At one stroke Hanan had combined the religious charge of blasphemy, and the political one of treason.

The expectant multitude without, leaned forward and craned their necks the better to see and hear; they had seen Jesus in the Temple, had heard him preach, had even been among those who stood and waved palms when Jesus and his disciples had entered Jerusalem in triumph not so long ago. Now, they were going to see a prophet humbled in the dust. Ah! what greater delight than to see those who have reached the heights, brought down to earth! To see those who have presumed to teach us, drinking to the bitter dregs the ultimate lesson of death.

So this was the charge!

Pilate glanced in the direction of Jesus who had been taken within into the Hall of Judgment where the High Priest Caiaphas dared not follow, lest he be defiled. As if on an impulse, Pilate turned and went in. He stood before Jesus for a moment, silent, regarding the calm and quiet figure of the Master. It did not seem possible to Pilate that this dignified man, so strangely serene, could be either a traitor or a blasphemer.

"Tell me," Pilate asked abruptly, "art thou King of the Jews?" Pilate was remembering that his wife had told him about this strange teacher who had run afoul of the fanatical Jewish Priesthood.

"Sayest thou this of thyself, or did other tell it to thee of me?" Jesus asked in return.

"Bah!" Pilate exclaims not unkindly, "Am I a Jew?" Then: "Thine own people and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?"

What had he done? From the summit of his complete renunciation, Jesus thought of all that had occurred during the years of ministry, of John the Baptist, of his desciples, of all that he had preached and told the multitudes in the Temple, and the synagogues and the countryside. How explain to this Pagan mind all that he, Jesus, had poured out of the fulness of his heart? He stood tall, quiet, the crown of thorns still upon his brow, the stained and torn robe showing patches of bruised flesh; and yet more than ever he was at peace. At last he spoke, and his words did not refer to Pilate's question concerning what he, Jesus, had done.

"My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus said with a faraway look, "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews."

Curiously, wondering what sort of kingdom Jesus referred to, Pilate inquired with a tinge of astonishment: "Art thou, then a king?"

And Jesus nodded. "Yes, I am a king; to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into this world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth, heareth my voice."

Pilate had a curious sense of unreality, he felt strangely as if he had been asked to pass sentence on a sovereign; and yet, here was this prisoner whose very life reposed in the hollow of his mailed hand, tattered,

dishevelled, bearing the marks of torment on his body and his calm face. The truth . . . the truth. . . .

"What is the truth?" Pilate asked in the voice of one who expetcs no answer. All his instincts cried out against pronouncing sentence on this inoffensive prisoner. Thoughtfully, Pilate retraced his steps.

Once more he stood upon the *bima,* the tribunal from where he passed sentence, and to the disgust and rage of both priests and populace, Pilate proclaimed: "I find no fault in this man."

In the general uproar that ensued, the priests were quick to seize the advantage; circulating among the rabble, they provided the necessary phrases, adding charges to those already recited, and inflaming the multitude.

The Roman Governor was exasperated. "Ye have brought this man unto me," he shouted, "as one that corrupteth the people. I have examined him and found no fault in him. I shall therefore punish him and let him go!"

The priests blanched; the accursed Galilean was to be saved after all! But even as they ransacked their minds for further arguments against his being freed, a new distraction entered into the scene.

The crowd roared at Pilate, "It is the passover . . . deliver a prisoner unto us!"

For an instant Pilate thought that the crowd wanted Jesus. He felt with relief that, perhaps, after all, it would not be necessary to sacrifice this harmless philosopher to the fanatical priesthood. But he was wrong. For when he proposed to release Jesus to them, the priests had already done their work.

"Not this man but Jesus Bar-Rabban," they shrieked, naming a rebellious figure who had been involved in a murder, and although detested by the priesthood, was popular with the mob. By ironical coincidence, his name, too, was Jesus.

"Bar-Rabban . . . Bar-Rabban . . ." the crowd shouted.

Anything — anything was acceptable to the priests except that Jesus of Nazareth should go free.

"What will ye then that I shall do unto him who ye call the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked, white with contempt and anger.

And from all sides came the cruel, the fanatical chorus of voices demanding; "Crucify him! Crucify him!" It was a tremendous volume of sound, pouring from myriad throats, their blood-lust aroused.

"Why, what evil hath he done?" Pilate was still reluctant. How he hated this intractable and stubborn people!

"We have no king but Caesar. If thou let this man go," a voice instinct with venom shouted, "thou are not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar!"

It was then that Pilate understood in full measure the decision he had to make. It was either give up Jesus to his enemies, or be prepared to put down a terrible riot with an incalculable amount of bloodshed. His official position was already none too secure with the emperor Tiberius.

At last Pilate yielded, but not before disclaiming any and all responsibility, throwing it squarely upon the shoulders of the priests. He wanted none of the innocent blood on his hands.

"His blood be on us and on our children!" The priests

exclaimed, glad to take on the responsibility if only they could bring about the death of Jesus. They uttered the terrible words amid a chorus of approval from the rabble.

At a gesture from Pilate, Jesus was brought out. The soldiers put a scarlet robe on him, and a reed in his hand. Jesus was spit upon and buffeted as the crowd danced an obscene saraband in front of him.

"Hail, King of Jews," they cried in mockery.

It was a pandemonium of base passions and evil emotions released at the sight of the man who had counselled them to love one another.

Pilate withdrew from the revolting scene, with a heavy sense of defeat. He recalled the words of his wife who had implored him to have nothing to do with the fate of Jesus, for she had seen him and heard him, and was convinced that dire things would be visited upon them if he were to sentence Jesus. The clamor outside had reached the proportions of a general uproar, as others were drawn by the noise to swell the ranks of those who had come first.

When the news of their triumph was brought by the priests to Hanan, he rubbed his fat soft hands thoughtfully and murmured: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."

Those were the very words that the priests had spat at Pilate.

XXI

Jesus' face is blanched with fatigue as he carries the heavy cross. A harsh, sibilant April wind brings a presage of rain, and the morning is dark and gloomy. A shouting, jostling mob is following the procession; many are weeping, in a sort of ultimate despair, and others cry out rebelliously at the sight of their Master's plight, for there are many followers of Jesus among the Jews — a multitude drawn from the thousands who had followed him in his ministry. Could they have been present before the fortress Antonia, instead of the minions of the priests, when the Governor Pilate had washed his hands of the whole affair, perhaps history would have been different. The two condemned thieves accompanying Jesus are silent.

A group of centurions entrusted with carrying out the sentences of crucifixion are out of humor; it seems to them beneath the dignity of a Roman soldier. But they have their orders. The looks they bestow on the crowds are eloquent of their feelings.

Against the deathly pallor of his face, Jesus' eyes are immense and luminous — intensely blue. But even his strong and supple body is at the point of exhaustion, for throughout the previous endless night of humiliation and

torture at the hands of his enemies, Jesus has not had a moment's rest. Still, Jesus voices no complaint; now and then he staggers under the cruel weight of the poplar cross, its wood is still partly green increasing its weight. The road to Golgotha seems endless!

The Captain in charge of the Roman soldiers noticing that Jesus although silent, can no longer keep up with them, scans the crowds following them, and overflowing on either side of them, and his eyes alight on a tall, strongly built youth.

"Here, you! Thou are strongly knit!"

Exerting the power of the conqueror, the Captain forces Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross on which Jesus is to be crucified. Simon at first is terrified, fearing lest he, too, is to be executed, but the Captain calms his fears.

Jesus trudging at his side, rests his hand lightly on Simon's left shoulder. Even in his exhaustion, with the imminence of death before his eyes, Jesus for a fleeting instant smiles a wan and tired smile on Simon.

It was not long thereafter when they finally arrive. The summit of the hill is bare and desolate, swept by the bitter wind under lowering skies. The feel of death is in the very air, and when the soldiers, anxious to be done with, begin nailing the thieves to their respective crosses, their cries of agony and horror add to the ghastly atmosphere.

Soon the two crosses are lifted, then inserted in the holes that have been dug. A transversal piece between the legs supports their bodies which would soon have sagged downwards otherwise, rending the nailed hands; placards describing the crimes they have committed, have already been nailed to the topmost piece of each cross.

The thieves have not ceased their screaming, for the first few minutes of torture are the worst. The full horror of what they are to endure, makes their minds preternaturally clear, and mingled with the hoarse cries of pain are curses and pleas which fall on deaf ears, for the Roman soldiers are innured to pity.

And then, it is Jesus' turn.

Unresisting, the soldier stretches Jesus on the cross; as the first cruel nail is driven through the palm of his hand, and the first flaming agony shrieks through his nerves, Jesus silently closes his eyes. Again the exquisite torture overwhelms him as his other hand is pierced. Finally he feels the final torment as they nail his feet.

In a haze of blinding pain, Jesus feels the cross being raised; the torment of thirst and bitter nausea mingles with the pain of his wounds. He feels a lance thrust, not deep but cruel in his side, and the tight crown of thorns bites into his flesh.

Jesus unable to suppress a moan, sees a sponge soaked in aromatic wine lifted at the end of a stick, brought near his lips; it is a mixture designed to dull the senses and assuage pain. With an effort of will, Jesus shakes his head in refusal. For a moment he opens his eyes and gazes about him, searching for even a friendly face, someone among the many he has known.

But the multitude has dispersed to celebrate Passover, and his disciples could not be seen.

At a distance, indistinct shapes stand watching in a deep and silent agony of their own. Had Jesus but known, Mary Magdalen has come as near as she dares, and has remained, intending not to leave.

But all Jesus can see is the dark and forbidding sky,

the faces of the Roman soldiers as they dice for his robe, and the last meager possessions of the thieves.

All he can hear are derisive shouts.

"He trusted in God; let him deliver him now: for he said, I am the Son of God. He saved others, himself he cannot save."

"If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him!"

And still another scoffing, cruel voice: "Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself!"

It is a universe of loneliness for Jesus, with the earth itself gloomy and unfriendly. He does not know that a distance away Mary Magdalen and Mary Cleophas, with Joanna and Salome and John, suffer with him in the wordless agony of those who love and are helpless to protect the beloved. Others of his disciples are among them, praying. But to Jesus it seems as if he were nailed to the cross, forsaken.

One of the thieves reviles Jesus, and exclaims: "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us!"

But the other thief, in the midst of his torture and despair, rebukes his companion: "Art thou not ashamed?" he asks. "This man has done nothing amiss!" Then turning his face towards Jesus, he says: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

It is like an omen.

A measure of peace returns to the features of Jesus; the life force in his body already is ebbing, but he has the strength to reply in soft and clear tones: "This very night thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

The skies above become darker and stormier, and

heavy clouds driven by the wind toss to and fro. All the torture and despair that he has felt is also a storm within his heart.

Unable to contain himself any longer, Jesus cries out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It is the despairing cry of a heart on which all the changes of torture had been rung. It is the last protest of a body wracked by a terrible agony of pain and despair.

Even the unfeeling Roman soldiers boredly awaiting the final demise of the condemned three, are startled by the depth of feeling in that cry of Jesus. Astonished they gaze at one another, then shake their heads. One of them moistens a sponge and on the end of the stick places it close to Jesus' lips.

Suddenly a heartrending cry shatters the stillness, and Jesus in a voice strong and clear exclaims: "It is finished." Then, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" Jesus' eyes close.

It seems as if a radiance leaves his face. His head drops slowly on his breast and the rigid limbs relax as his body dies on the cross.

Startled, the Roman Captain and his centurions gaze at Jesus. It is incredible that he could have died so soon. Sometimes it took from two to three days for a condemned man to die on the cross, and Jesus had been crucified barely three hours!

For a moment they stand transfixed, and then they hear the distant and muffled sound of a woman's agonized sobs.

It is Mary Magdalen who mourns.

Suddenly the storm that had been in the making,

burst in full force, a vast wind sweeps like a hurricane, and the lightning zig-zags in the skies; the drumming of thunder is like a million hooves, and darkness hides the splendor of Jerusalem in the distance below.

XXII

Pontius Pilate regarded his visitor sceptically; it could not possibly be that Jesus had died in a mere three hours on the cross. Still, Pilate knew the Jewish mind, and he was aware that this high member of the Sanhedrim who so courteously was making a formal request for the body of Jesus, was not lying. His curiosity aroused, Pilate wondered what motive impelled the Sanhedrist in making his request. Had not the priests and elders of the Council brought about the death of Jesus? And now this man was requesting that the body of the crucified Jesus be delivered to him without recourse to the crurifragium — the breaking of the legs!

He summoned the Captain of the guards and questioned him in swift Latin: "Has Jesus really died?"

The death was unequivocally confirmed; he, himself had seen the blood and water flow at a lance-thrust delivered to make sure, the Centurion explained. After that, Pilate acceded gladly, eager to end a chapter of which he felt secretly ashamed, for he knew he had been worsted by the cunning of the priests.

It was late afternoon when Nicodemus finally arrived with the necessary materials for the embalming of the body for temporary burial; Mary Magdalen assisted by

the other women anointed the body with myrrh and frankincense and aloes, and wrapped it in new linen.

Already the evening star — that evening star that so many times had shone forth as if to lead all the constellations of the heavens in its glory while Jesus had preached — was climbing the skies, and the next day was the Sabbath.

They buried Jesus in the tomb hollowed out of rock which had been reserved for Joseph of Arimathea.

Together Joseph and Nicodemus interred Jesus in the unused tomb, and together they rolled the great boulder that sealed its entrance.

For a while they stood in silence before the temporary resting place as the darkness deepened, and a thousand memories of all Jesus had said and done, sped through their minds like homeless birds.

At last they left, intending to return the day following the Sabbath, each one going their separate ways, except the women, who, arms about each other were in an ecstacy of grief. Such was their love, that it hardly seemed possible to them that Jesus — that shining spirit who for a brief moment had been a radiance in their midst, was gone; gone from the broken body that lay so white and still in Joseph's tomb.

When they returned to Jerusalem, they heard the great wind had rent the Veil in the Temple and overturned all the sacred artifacts. There were rumors that the priceless veil rent itself from top to bottom, and that the Temple itself had rocked as if in the grip of an earthquake.

It was a strange and gloomy Passover, for the whis-

pers and rumours had terrified many, and the mutterings of the crowds have magnified the news.

Mary Magdalen walked rapidly, as if in haste to reach the temporary sepulcher where Jesus' body reposed in its last sleep. She carried with one arm a bundle of linen and fragrant oils with which to anoint and wrap the body of Jesus — the other arm she had thrown about the thin shoulders of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The older Mary did not weep any longer, her eyes were wide and unseeing, clouded with a universe of pain.

The other women striving to keep up, lagged behind a little, also carrying things that would be needed for embalming Jesus' body.

It was Sunday, the Sunday following the Passover. The skies that had been darkened and troubled, had cleared and shone limpid with the tranquility that follows a great storm. The early morning air was fresh and exhilarating, and the rising sun had captured at last the throbbing warmth of Spring.

The small group of women walked in silence. Not a heavy, uncomfortable silence, but rather a lack of words in which all of them shared their innermost thoughts — for they were thinking only of Jesus. In their hearts, they strove to hear the echoes of that great and long-sustaining harmony that was now stilled. And once the Mother Mary said in the voice of one to whom has dawned a great understanding: "My son, my son. . . ."

Mary Magdalen turned her golden head ever so little at the murmur of the older woman's words, and her

strong, young arm tightened around Mary's frail shoulders.

When they entered the garden where the tomb was located, they went immediately to the sepulcher. Impatiently, Mary Magdalen went ahead of the rest.

Suddenly she stood transfixed, a deep unintelligible cry welled from her throat. The large boulder that had sealed the entrance to Jesus' tomb had been moved aside. The bundle dropped from her nerveless hands, and her heart beat wildly. Mary Magdalen's first thought was to summon the disciples, and leaving the other women to follow her, she sped in search of Simon Peter and John.

When Mary Magdalen found Peter, she was almost incoherent trying to master her emotions.

John joined her as did Peter, and they heard her say: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him!"

Without wasting a further instant, Simon Peter and John hurried to the tomb in the garden. They did not know what to think, a thousand conjectures flitted through their minds, and something . . . something that gripped their hearts and lent wings to their feet.

John was the swiftest and arrived first. He did not enter the tomb, but stooping looked in, and saw the linen cloths lying in the tomb, as if they had not been disturbed, much as a winged and glorious life would emerge from its chrysalis.

And then Peter, in characteristic fashion, arrived panting and out of breath. Unhesitatingly he entered the tomb and saw the undisturbed linen cloths, the napkin that Jesus had worn on his head rolled up in a place by itself.

Slowly John followed Peter in, and together they stood silent and awed in the sepulchral peace of the rock-hewn resting place.

Mary Magdalen knelt beside the open tomb and wept in slow, unending agony. She had brought myrrh and aloes, and the glowing fragrance of spikenards with which to anoint the body of Jesus; fine white linens to wrap him, and the devotion of a consecrated heart to add its silent music to her task. But she had found it was not necessary.

She thought of Jesus as she had seen him so many times, on the hillsides, standing tall and straight as the young cypress and balsam trees, or against the luminous blue of the sea of Galilee, that to Mary Magdalen, was less blue than his eyes. She heard again in retrospect the vibrant cadence of his words, and remembered the first time she had dried his feet with her own hair.

Mary Magdalen tried to banish from her mind that one last spectral glimpse of Jesus nailed on the cross, and could not — her hands clenched with the pain of the driven nails, as if it had been her own flesh they had transfixed.

And then, in the somnolent peace of the garden, where only a murmurous breeze raised elfin echoes, she heard a single word.

"Mary!"

She raised her eyes, and for an instant her senses reeled as she saw Jesus standing before her, smiling that ineffable smile that was like a silent benediction — just as she remembered him before Golgotha and the cross. She could not speak, she scarcely could breathe, until a

cry from the innermost depths of her heart welled to her lips: "Rabboni!"

She tottered forward, hands outstretched.

In the delirium of a nameless ecstasy, Mary was sure as only the heart can be sure, that she heard him say: "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to the Father."

It seemed to Mary Magdalen as if the very heavens had opened, and all the angels and cherubim were singing a wordless, welling music of resurrection that merged with the resurrection in her heart.

Then she heard him add in vibrant tones:

"But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and to your Father; and to my God and your God."

On the wings of happiness, Mary went to tell the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. They marvelled as they beheld her features transfigured as if by an inner radiance.

It was that deathless, that divine stream of love which in Jesus had found its greatest impetus, and that for a measureless instant had touched Mary Magdalen with its ultimate meaning.

PZ3 .D419G
The Galilean : a life of Jesus
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00076 6909